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**FIRST IN THE FIELD.**

**VOL. II.**



# FIRST IN THE FIELD.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

“RECOMMENDED TO MERCY,”

&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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# FIRST IN THE FIELD.

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## CHAPTER I.

“**Y**ES, Mr. Reginald, it's true what you've heard up at the village—quite true, and more's the pity! She's gone away, the silly lass! Poor Mary's child, that I thought to have beside me till she found herself a good husband—one that could afford to keep her as she should be kept. But, ah's me! sir, young folks in these days don't think o' much beside themselves, and belike she got tired o' th' old place, and found it dull, though she *do* say in the letter she left behind her, that 't ain't *that*, nowise, as took the child away from us.”

Farmer Beamish—whom the reader will have



no difficulty in identifying as the utterer of these lamentable words—had begun, before they had well left his lips, to busy himself in looking for the letter which the misguided girl, who had at last fulfilled her threat, and clandestinely left the Lees—had despatched thither with all convenient speed. The kind-hearted though quick-tempered old man, who, as “the boys” did not hesitate loudly to proclaim, deserved a better return from their cousin Lizzie than the trick which she had played him, slowly turned over the pages of the family Bible (for it was between them—a too little visited hiding-place—that he had placed the missive) with toil-worn, but still, for his time of life, vigorous fingers.

“It is but a weeny scrap o’ writing to tell so much,” he said, gazing for a few moments, through his spectacles, at the poor apology for ingratitude; and then, forgetting for a moment everything but his own immediate troubles, the old man, moved by his instinctive craving after human sympathy, was continuing, “Mebbe,

Mr. Reginald, you wouldn't mind just looking over poor Lizzie's letter yourself—" when the recollection that his guest, the young man who, with a face so full of kindness and intelligence, had been listening to his troubles, had no longer eyes wherewith to see, flashed so painfully across the old man's mind, that Regy found it hard to arrest the torrent of his self-reproaches. "It was just a slip of the tongue, lad," he said, regardless, in his eagerness to apologise, of conventional rules, "and I wouldn't ha' taken—that I wouldn't—the valler o' the best crop of hay that ever came off the twenty-acre medder, to ha' said such a word. But, lor a' mèrcy!" he rambled on, cutting short Regy's smiling assurances that the *lapsus linguæ* was of no consequence whatever, "it all comes—saving your presence, Mr. Reginald—of your being a gentleman. It don't come nat'ral like that high-up folks should lose their limbs, or be *dark*, or, as the Bible says, come into misfortune, like other men. If you'd ha' been one of us, now, I'll go bail I wouldn't ha' forgot that though your

looks don't pity you, it has pleased God that you—as good a young gentleman, begging your pardon for saying so, as ever wore shoe-leather, can never see the sun and the stars—let alone a bit o' written paper—again.”

Much to Reginald's relief, the mention of the “written paper” brought back John Beamish's train of thought to his erring niece, and to his, as yet, unexpressed desire, that young Mr. Temple, for whose judgment the worthy farmer entertained a high opinion, would consent to arbitrate, in the case of Lizzie Fairholme, between her uncle's conscience and himself.

“You see, Mr. Reginald,” the old farmer, after reading aloud the girl's short but deeply feeling letter, said, “the lass writes as though I'd been short with her of late, and says as much as that she couldn't a-bear to stay where she didn't feel to be welcome. That's about it—ain't it, sir?”

Reginald could not deny that such was the meaning which Lizzie's rather guarded words were intended to convey, but at the same time,

and in his inmost heart, he did not, gladly as he would have put trust in the girl's honour and truth, believe that in thus writing she had given to the old man the real reason of her departure.

Every word of Lizzie's had but confirmed Reginald in his worst fears.

"If only you had been lately the same kind uncle that you once were to me, I should never have done what must seem to you so wicked; but you have grown to be so different, Uncle John, and my father's daughter neither ought nor will accept any favours save those which are given with love." It was thus that Lizzie Fairholme, dangerously influenced, as usual, by foolish notions of her family's inborn greatness, endeavoured to excuse her conduct, after which futile effort she added a few humbler lines, entreating those who might still—notwithstanding her apparent ingratitude, be interested in her fate, to believe that, come what might, she would never bring disgrace either upon herself or her family. She wound up by saying that when

her plans for the future were settled, she would write again; and in the meantime she hoped that, for her mother's sake, and for that of auld lang syne, her "dear Uncle John" would think as leniently as he could of the girl whom in happier times he used to call his "May blossom."

His May blossom! Ay, sweet as flowers, making the merrie months so bright and beautiful, had been the girl who had now, without a word of warning, save the few which, uttered in confidence to George Beamish, that simple-hearted colonist had rashly concluded to be but idle talk, gone from those who loved her, from the sheltering home which she had once loved to call her own!

"And wherever the silly wench 'll get money enough to keep her, is more nor I can guess," said the old man. "Lizzie ain't one of the working sort, and——"

"But have you taken no steps to find Miss Fairholme?" asked Reginald, who, on hearing the already widely spread report of Lizzie's flight, had had himself driven with all speed to

the farm in the pony-carriage kept expressly for his use. "Is there *no* likelihood of tracing her? And if found, is there not every reason to hope that she will think better of this sad, this foolish resolution? She has so long regarded you as her father——"

"Ah, lad, so she has, surely," broke in the old man. "George said the same words nearly when he went after her last night. 'But what is the good?' I says to him. 'If Lizzie ain't got a daughter's feelings nat'ral like, there ain't no good a-trying to give 'em to her.'"

"And you have heard nothing from Mr. George Beamish since?"

"Not a word, and don't expect to. You see, sir, 'twasn't known for so long that she was gone. We thought on her—so we did—as safe at Purley End; for, as I told you, sir, Lizzie left us the day afore yesterday, saying she was going to drink tea and sleep at Mrs. Rolt's. And so she did, it seems—she didn't trick us there; but yesterday after breakfast she says good-bye to the Rolts, and with her little black

leather bag in her hand, she walks away, as they think, poor souls (for Mrs. Rolt is as good a neighbour as ever man had), to come home, which, as we know, she never did; and, in course, no one suspecting as anything was amiss, time was lost; and, as I said before, I, for one, don't think much of the chance of catching her."

Reginald, lost in miserable thoughts—thoughts to which in that presence it was impossible for him to give utterance, sat, facing the upright, kind-hearted old man, whose hearth his own brother Guy, the selfish and the scheming, had, of this Regy felt little doubt, so large a share in depriving of its brightest charm.

With this fell secret gnawing at his breast, every moment which he spent at the Lees was a moment of penance to Reginald. He longed to be alone—alone, that he might be enabled to concentrate all his powers of mind, every reasoning faculty he possessed, on the subject in hand; and so, rising from his seat with an

abruptness which rather surprised his host, he said, with extended hand,

“Mr. Beamish, I need not tell you how sincerely I feel for you. We have been friends too long for any assurances on my part that it was not idle curiosity which brought me here to-day, to be called for or expressed.”

“Surely yes, Mr. Reginald. There’s no need, as you say, of words,” responded the old farmer, who, between his own sad thoughts and the fact that his young guest had not quite adapted the turn of his last phrase to suit the slowness of ideas peculiar to the untaught bucolic mind, looked a trifle bewildered.

“But if ever,” continued Reginald, whilst a faint flush stole over his delicate face, “it *should* happen that I can be of service in any way, to you or yours, I pray you to send, without delay or scruple, to Temple Court. You promise me this?” he added, laying his hand kindly on John Beamish’s rough coat-sleeve. “It is not much that I can ever hope to do for



my neighbours. But in this instance possibly——”

He stopped, fearing to say too much; and then, feeling his way with his stick, and hardly listening to his host's well-meaning warnings to steer clear of a corner of a dresser *here*, and the projecting arm of a chair *there*, Regy, with a heart brimful of pain and misgivings, took his place beside the grey-headed coachman (an old retainer of the family, who, at the time when he drank the baby's health at Master Reginald's christening, had already been thirty years in the now greatly reduced in grandeur stables at Temple Court), and was driven at a slow trot homewards.

“A sad business this, Master Reginald,” said Attfield, who not seldom availed himself of the privilege so frequently accorded to faithful old domestics, of speaking without being first spoken to by their masters——“an uncommon sad business as has 'appened this long time. It's partiklar strange, now,” he added, after a pause, which his young master did not take ad-

vantage of to respond to, "how sich a thing could ha' 'appened."

"Very strange. But, Attfield, the least said about that kind of thing the better; and I advise you to repeat what I say to any who speak to you on the subject. Miss Fairholme, for some reason or other—probably she found it dull at the Lees—has chosen, I suppose, to go out as a governess, or something of that kind; and fearing that her uncle, Mr. Beamish, would object to her doing so, she, very foolishly, as every one must think, decided on going away without asking his permission."

Attfield was silent for a few moments. He had ever been accounted a shrewd man for his station in life, and Reginald, even whilst in the act of throwing that handful of dust into the old man's eyes, had not much faith in the blinding consequences of the deed. He was less surprised, therefore, than annoyed when his chariteer, after administering a touch of the whip to the pony's fat sides, said, with a discreet but unnecessary lowering of the voice (for they

were in the open, and with the exception of a few birds of the air, which were little likely to carry the matter, there was no living thing within sight or hearing)—

“I’m ready, Master Reginald, to say anything as you thinks best, be it ever so contrairy to what’s likely; but now, sir, I’ll just ask you as a young gentleman, whether you think it reason’ble that that there tale ’ll go down? I beg pardon—so I do, if I’m too free o’ speech, but I’d rayther not, if it’s the same to you, Master Reginald, be taken, at my time o’ life, for a wuss fool than God ’mighty made me; and when I’ve seen with my own two eyes——”

“What? What have you seen?” exclaimed Regy, too much excited and alarmed for the whispers of prudence to be listened to; but indeed, as soon became terribly evident, it mattered little what, at that moment, were the words which escaped his lips; for old Attfield, nothing loth, after the fashion of the aged, to talk, soon made it clear to Reginald that the secret meetings between Guy Temple and the

"Lily of the Lees" had been indulged in far too often for the affair to have much chance of remaining secret.

"'Twarn't none o' my business to mention it," the old coachman wound up by saying. "Young gentlemen, we all on us knows, will be young gentlemen, and——"

"Oh, stop, pray!" exclaimed Regy, whose genuine refinement of nature and delicacy of feeling had caused this short dialogue to be to him one of the most painful events of his life. "You are deciding, Attfield, without proof against my brother, whilst instead—having lived with us so long—you ought to have taken his part, and said that you knew Mr. Guy far too well not to be sure that, if he *did* walk sometimes with Miss Fairholme, there was no harm meant by it. Guy, indeed! He may think Mr. Beamish's niece very pretty—everyone *must* think that—but it isn't like him; he's so steady and quiet——"

Regy paused for a second or two here, and Attfield, aware—which his blind young master

was not—that they were approaching to within a short distance of “home,” seized the opportunity of getting in his word.

“I’ll say everything as you tells me, Master Reginald, even a’most as to swear as black’s white ; but along of knowing anything about Master Guy, what he’s up to doing, and what he ain’t, why, I’m jist as ignorant as a babby in arms. Now, if it was the Colonel, or yourself now, Master Reginald, as I heerd evened to such a thing——”

“Don’t talk nonsense!” broke in Reginald, angrily ; and, as the little carriage came to a sudden stop at the stable entrance, he added, in a half-whisper, whilst the crimson blush of shame mantled his cheek, “Keep all this as quiet as you can, Attfield. My mother would be so annoyed by these absurd stories, if they happened to reach her ears. Thanks——” as, leaning on the old man’s arm, he slowly set his foot on the pavement of the yard—“And, Attfield, I didn’t mean to be cross. One is so wrong to speak, as I did, hastily.”

“Lord love ’ee, Master Reginald,” said the old retainer, who had been, even as the utterer of that one irritable sentence had feared, greatly mortified by the unexpected rebuff which he had received, “you couldn’t be hasty—not you—if you tried to ever so; and, about Mr. Guy, I’ll take care as no one evens his name to Miss Lizzie’s in *my* hearing. But, as I said before,” he added to himself, after watching Regy, as the latter slowly moved away across the Court, “young gentlemen is young gentlemen, and it’s only nat’ral as they should behave as such.”

## CHAPTER II.

IT was the transient sight, caught only for a passing moment, of Lizzie hanging on the arm of her stalwart Anglo-Australian cousin, and a few words caught *à tort et à travers*, perhaps, but which Guy, with the perversity and power of self-tormenting peculiar to lovers, twisted into meanings adverse to his interests, that maddened him to a resolve which had for its purpose the securing to himself possession not only of Lizzie Fairholme's affections, but of the delicate beauty which had so long been the object of his desire.

When, after that Sunday walk with George Beamish, during the course of which that

L straightforward individual did battle, as best he could, against the ungrateful fancy, as he did not hesitate to call it, which had taken hold of Lizzie, to desert in his declining years the generous and affectionate old man who, when her father's own kindred cast her off, took her as a daughter to his home and heart—when, as I was about to say, after that unsatisfactory walk on the outskirts of the Temple Court paddocks was over, Lizzie stole forth again, and this time with a very humbling sense of shame at her own duplicity, to the spot where she had appointed to meet her lover, who (whilst his passion-fever was running its natural course) had grown so bold, that he inspired in the pure breast of shy, inexperienced Lizzie almost as much fear as love.

To analyze her varied and contradictory emotions as she tripped, with footsteps far lighter than her heart, to the trysting-place, would be impossible. The influence of her cousin's earnest words, and of the wholesome moral atmosphere which seemed ever to sur-



round the man who in all his life had never either said or done that of which he had the faintest reason to feel ashamed, still hovered about her, working faintly, and at every moment working more faintly, for good within her breast and conscience. Neither, during morning service, had she quite without effect, knelt in prayer beneath the old monument to the respected and long since departed Beamishes, whilst the stirring words with which Mr. Meredith endeavoured to wake up the slumbering consciences of his flock had not, in Lizzie's case, fallen, like the good seed in the parable, upon a rock.

More than once that day, at moments when fear, which the love she bore to her well-born admirer was powerless to cast out, held the mastery over her mind, Lizzie almost entertained the belief that she was capable of *not*, on that occasion at least, keeping the tryst, to which for many days past she had been looking forward with such exciting but nevertheless contradictory sensations. It was the dread,

vague and unspoken even to her own half-wavering heart, that Guy Temple, angered by her coldness and her breach of faith, would, in the event of her absence that day, fulfil certain terrifying threats, the heavy artillery of his battle stores, and cease altogether from troubling her, which, in the scale held by Lizzie's trembling fingers, turned it in favour of ill-doing. She was so totally inexperienced, and maidenly modest as she still, in spite of those same stolen meetings, was, this girl was utterly ignorant of the mighty power which coveted beauty exercises over men. The lesson, so hard a one, as many women find it, to learn, of the vast change which possession so often works in those who, when their bliss is, as it were, still in abeyance, are the most passionate and devoted of lovers, had yet, considering it as one of the hard cruel facts of life, to be laid to heart by the object of Guy Temple's eager pursuit. The mighty difference between the *avant* and the *après*, was as yet, for Lizzie

Fairholme, at fresh beautiful eighteen, a thing not to be dreamt of in her simple, every-day philosophy.

“How you tremble! Lizzie! my own! what has frightened you so? What harm can come to my darling when——”

“Oh, Guy, you don’t know. Only a girl—a woman, I mean—could understand what I feel. I oughtn’t to be here. You know, as well as I do, how wrong it is.”

“Wrong! My silly pet, what has put that into your head? And how can you, who, as long as you can remember, have lived the life almost of a little nun, at that stupid old farmhouse, understand, in such matters as this, what is, or what is not, what you call, with that darling little lisp of yours, ‘whong?’”

“Ah,” the girl answers, whilst the bright smile, which Guy had hoped would be the result of his small attempt at mimicry, breaks, like April sunshine, through the clouds which had begun to gather over her charming face—

“ah, that is the way! You make me laugh, and then what can I say?”

“What indeed?” The answer to Guy seemed obvious enough. She was expected to say nothing, whilst he—but Lizzie’s mood did not happen at that moment to chime in with his. She had grown, as I before said, more to tremble at than rejoice in those small lover-like familiarities which had the effect of making Guy look so wild, and speak in a voice that sounded so unlike his own, whilst he held her, oh! so close, to his broad chest, that she trembled like a frightened bird in his embrace.

Had Lizzie been what she, in her simple phraseology, called “regularly engaged” to Mr. Temple, and had her courting been done in the usually received and normal way, with a chaperon all but within hearing and seeing distance, and without the faintest possibility that on her part a suspicion *might* arise that the lover sitting in such close proximity to her white shoulder *could* despise the girl for the permission coyly given

“To press his eager lip to hers,  
Whilst love-words gluttred her love-greedy ears;”

had, I repeat, all these things been properly *en règle*, it is more than probable that Lizzie would not so visibly—yet not without some evidence of womanly tact—have endeavoured to ward off the moment when the species of combat (which usually ended in her own defeat) was, between Guy and her unconscionable wooer, to commence.

“I don’t know,” she, with a pretty, simulated pout, continued, “why you should say that I don’t understand things. Even though I *have* lived so very long at the farm, it does not follow that I have vegetated like—like some overgrown weed that knows nothing and feels nothing. I have read a *little*, sir,” looking up a trifle saucily into a face which had grown suddenly grave—a transformation which temporarily lessened Lizzie’s chronic state of alarm, “and I remember what I read, which is more than some people do. Now you couldn’t tell me the names of any of the people in that

wonderful story of George Eliot's, which, the newspaper said, was so clever, and yet you had read it only a month before; now I——”

“ Well, what can clever *I* remember?” Guy, making prisoner the little hand that rested on his arm, said. “ You have not read so many books, I suspect, my Lizzie, that you can have much difficulty in recollecting what they are about—eh, is it not so, pet?”

Lizzie hesitated, blushing, a good deal to Guy's surprise, “ celestial, rosy red,” at this apparently simple and unsuggestive question; for there *was* a book—a delightful, soul-stirring novel—which, amongst the very few that had chanced to fall in Lizzie's way, had not only been read by her with an eagerness proportioned to its merits, but had set her thinking, after a fashion which might have been, had she been a wiser and less ambitious maiden, greatly for her eventual well-being.

It was the vivid recollection of having felt, whilst reading that charming book, that certain pages of *Lost and Saved* were better—more in-

structive, and more full of wholesome warning, than many a sermon, which sent the warm blood to her cheek, and caused her to say shyly, and without looking into the deep-set blue eyes which were bent searchingly into hers,

“I remember almost every word, I think, of that beautiful novel of Mrs. Norton’s, *Lost and Saved*. The saddest, pitifullest story! And Beatrice, the poor heroine, you know, was so good; and yet, because that horrid man deceived her by a false marriage, she was punished as much, and more, perhaps, than if she had been ever so guilty! Did you ever read the book, Guy? If you have, I *shall* be surprised if you have forgotten how deeply—painfully interesting it is.”

She looked up into his face, expecting the answer which did not readily come to the remarks and questions which in all guilelessness, and without an *arrière pensée*, she had given voice to. Her words had in truth set her companion thinking, and that very seriously, on a

project which had more than once vaguely, and not without a sensation of dismay—for he was no hardened sinner—crossed his mind. To openly unite himself in marriage with Lizzie Fairholme, would, as the reader has already been made aware, be to him nothing short of ruin. Miss Bainbridge, jealous of an influence—how and by what means attained, she had not sufficient delicacy of mind to care—and selfishly desirous of retaining as a bondsman the magnificent specimen of manhood, for the expenses of whose education she had doled out so many of her cherished guineas, would never—as Guy truly told himself—forgive the act which would make him the lawful husband of a penniless girl—a common farmer's niece, who, as the old maid would, of course, in her fury, say, had “meanly schemed” to entrap into her toils a well-born gentleman.

And, supposing himself to be “cast off” by his autocratic protectress, on what income could he and his fair wife depend? Simply on none. His Fellowship would be gone. That small



yet cherished independence, which alone had had the power of sometimes causing him to (metaphorically speaking) “kick” against the irritating exactions of his unfairy-like god-mother, would, as a matter of course, he ceasing to be a bachelor, be lost to him. “But,” whispered Passion, “*must* the fact of the marriage necessarily be made public? Surely, in this busy, overcrowded world—a world in which men as well as women have usually enough in their own immediate cares and interests to occupy the mind—*his* secret, the secret which he would surround with such a veil of mystery as had never been, since the days of ‘Fair Rosamond,’ invented by mortal man, must perforce escape detection.” “True; but then,” answered the voice—not the still small one of conscience, but the more loudly uttered whisperings which a sense of what was, in common parlance, “due to himself as a gentleman,” suggested to the tempted man—“true; but then how mean!—how dishonourable! And if it *should* be found out—if it *did*, notwithstanding all his

precautions, come to light that he had been guilty of conduct so utterly unworthy of a gentleman and a man of honour, could he ever dare, even if admitted into society again, to hold up his head before his fellow-men?"

The replies to these home and searching queries were, as may be supposed, in the negative. "But," again murmured the low, fierce cry of selfish desire, "is there no middle course? When discovery, which would work your ruin, comes, if you have so played your game as that you may be enabled to say boldly to the world, 'I am not really married—the girl who trusted to me, believing herself a virtuous wife, is only that by-society-despised thing, my *mistress*!' men, seeing that you have not done ill unto yourself, will continue to think well of you. Be crafty, then, and bold. Your sin, as the world views such matters, will be but a venial one; and, after all, Lizzie—dear girl—will not have so much cause to complain. She is sick to death of the dulness and ungenial atmosphere of the Farm—you will take care

that her new life is one of ease and pleasure ; and, in the after-time, when Passion's brief reign will be over, and that of prudence and common sense begins, why—what will probably be easier—for that horrid old woman may be dead then, and a thousand things may have happened—than to arrange everything comfortably for Liz.”

It was thus that, whilst away from the mighty influence exercised over him by the sight of Lizzie Fairholme's coveted beauty, Guy Temple was wont, prior to the memorable Sunday (to which date I have brought my story), to allow his thoughts to run riot in a mind from which *true* principle—that which teaches us to perform, irrespective of any regard to the opinion of society, our duty to our neighbour and our God—had never been rightfully instilled. But so slight and insignificant are often in appearance the causes which lead to results seriously affecting the future of men's lives ; it was the mention by Lizzie of her having “read, marked” and evidently “in-

wardly digested," a book so calculated to affect her feelings and resolves, *quoad* himself as the one in question, that more than half decided Guy as to the choice between two evils, which should be his. For he, too, had read with deep interest the work, at that time one of the recent publications which had taken so strong a hold on the imagination of his inexperienced sweetheart. Inexperienced, yet anything but slow of wit; anything but easy, now that her eyes were open that she could see, to deceive in the to her so all-important a matter as the *reality* of her marriage.

That the fact of her being his wife must remain "for the present"—a vague term, the possible duration of which Lizzie was not likely to ask to have explained—a secret from every living being save themselves, Guy had already made apparent to the orphan girl whose simple faith in the man of whose character and disposition she knew so little, might in a more generous breast have awakened feelings both of compassion and remorse.

“I can understand Miss Bainbridge wanting you to marry some rich fashionable girl,” she said, “and I wouldn’t for all the world—no, not to save myself from living as I am, till I shall be an old woman at the Lees, that you should get into trouble on my account. But is it *only* her” (Lizzie’s grammar was not always strictly correct) “who you will mind knowing you are married? I should so like, dear Guy, to think that some day your mother will perhaps love me, and your brother—that dear Reginald—I knew him well, before you ever spoke to me; and he could see then, and I remember——”

“What?” asked Guy, almost sharply, for he suddenly called to mind his blind brother’s reproof, and his earnest advocacy of pretty Lizzie’s cause. The girl too had stopped in her speech abruptly, and Guy, with the unreasoning jealousy of a lover, had already (all unlikely as it seemed), begun to suspect that poor Regy’s feelings towards Farmer Beamish’s niece had once been warmer than the lad was willing to allow.

“What do you remember?” he asked more

gently, for Lizzie's widely-opened blue eyes reminded him that his innocent love was no "girl of the period," ready and willing to be "chaffed" on the subject of her admirers. "Reginald, poor fellow, has been blind more than two years now, so that he could have been little more than a boy at the time when——"

"When he used to read beautiful poetry to me, as I sat at work in the parlour; and when his merry voice and sweet, bright face made everybody about the place love him. Yes, I suppose he *was* a boy," she continued musingly; "and yet, partly I think because he was so good, he didn't seem like one. Do you know, Guy," she added, looking up with a very sad expression in her eyes, "that if I ever do what you often ask me to, and go away from Uncle John's home to you, it will grieve me more almost than anything else to think that your brother Reginald must think ill of me."

"*He* think ill of you, darling!—and why? Surely you do not suppose——Why, Reginald is one of the last—the very last person on earth

whom I should wish to have informed of our secret marriage."

"And why, dear?—you mustn't mind my asking—but to me your brother seems so kind, so ready to make allowances——"

"Yes, he is all that," interrupted Guy, impatiently; "but Regy's being what you say, good and high-principled, and that kind of thing, is among the very cogent reasons why he should not be initiated into our mystery. He can keep nothing from my mother."

"Ah! that is so nice of him——"

"Very," rejoined Guy, drily, "but slightly inconvenient, nevertheless. But, Liz, darling, it is chiefly—so don't look so plaintive, and fancy all kinds of unexisting disagreeables—on account of poor Regy's health, and what the doctors call his anxious turn of mind, that I am so doubly desirous of keeping him in the dark. You could not bear, pet, to think that he was worrying himself ill by dwelling upon our troubles?"

Lizzie's answer, given with her whole heart,

may be guessed; and then—for the pair had just entered a gloomy, sequestered path, which the thickly-planted evergreens rendered as completely secluded as woodland walk could be—Lizzie, who, deeply occupied by the subject under discussion, had, without reflection on her part, been beguiled thither by her more astute companion, underwent, and, alas! came forth worsted in the contest, the severest trial to which her sense of right, her gratitude to her benefactor, and her dignity as a woman, had yet been exposed.

It is needless to repeat the arguments, the threats, the promises, all old as the everlasting hills, by means of which Guy Temple succeeded in extracting from Lizzie that promise that he sought.

“I cannot—*indeed* I cannot!” cried the poor girl, in genuine *fear*, oftentimes repeated, while tears—for there was no *coquetterie* in her sorrow—rained down the pallid cheeks, which even Guy’s ardent kisses failed either to warm or colour into brighter beauty.



The struggle, though not of long duration, was well sustained; and yet Lizzie, believing in and dreading, as she did, Guy's plainly-spoken alternative—the alternative, that is, of never, in the event of her refusal to grant his prayer, seeing his face again—must from the first have *almost* known how that stormy discussion, with its interludes of ardent kisses, and of promises couched in tenderest love-phrases, would end!

“My darling, you shall be so happy! I will make up to you for every sacrifice. Ah! if I could only make you *feel* how much I love you!”

These were Guy Temple's last words to the girl who, dried-eyed now, and to outward appearance calm, had pledged her word to be, ere six days more should pass over her virgin head, that infinitely-to-be-pitied thing, an unacknowledged wife.

In *his* breast, as, with the intoxicating memory of those sweet kisses on his lips, he trod the greensward on his homeward way, there

was room for little save exulting triumph at his own success ; whilst as for her—as for the pale-faced girl who, with lowered head and dragging footsteps, stole by a by-path through a back-stairs entrance to her room—she had never, if the sad truth must be told, felt so little love for Guy as at the hour when she promised, at all risks and sacrifices, to be his. She never suspected him of deceit, and yet the poor girl's heart, as she knelt that evening to pray beside her bed, was heavy as lead within her breast.

## CHAPTER III.

IT did not take a second glance to convince Conrad Temple that the man seated on the bench by Miss Ripley's side—the man whose air and manner the Colonel had (wholly unsuspected by the object of his curiosity) watched for a few minutes from behind a sheltering evergreen—was a “snob.”

It was not only the evident desire on the part of Hartwell Davison to appear *au mieux* with his fair companion of the moment, which caused Conrad to arrive at this unflattering conclusion, but a certain something, not only in his gestures, but the way in which the man wore his hat and coat, which were, to the looker-on—who was a considerably interested observer of “the game”—unmistakeable signs that the individual upon

whose obvious attempts to make himself agreeable Miss Ripley could not at that moment be accused of smiling, was certainly not a gentleman.

With a little cry of pleasure—for Latra had not, I fear, the dread of appearances before her eyes—was not a conventional young lady, and “those who ran ” might, if they chose, “read” in her countenance whether the heiress was pleased or pained—she rose, at sight of Conrad Temple, from the bench.

“I have only been here a few minutes,” she said, as they shook hands—“and think of your coming this way, and being here at all!” she added, as the recollection that the Crystal Palace in November was not exactly the locality for Colonel Temple to find himself in, flashed across her mind. “*I* am here with Mr. Davison and his sister; they are talking to some people close by—there, close behind that statue; and you——”

“Oh, *I* am here to see the chrysanthemums,” said Conrad, who was certainly not—with that

“d——d fellow” standing close by with his hands in his pockets—going to inform Miss Ripley that the reason of his visit was simply this : namely, that having returned from Paris (where, by-the-way, he had been thoroughly “cleaned out”), he had called, ten minutes after her departure, in Welbeck Place, and had there learned where it was just possible—if the Fates favoured their meeting—he might fall in with Miss Laura Ripley.

“One of the many broken resolutions with which I’ve helped to pave my way,” continued irreverent Conrad, “has been that of coming to see the Autumn show of those surprising flowers. They are very pretty—don’t you think so?”

“I am sure they are,” smiled Laura (she was always ready to be amused, and those quickly-coming smiles of hers were not, as spiteful people said, called up to show the perfect teeth which a vainer woman than Lolo would have been proud of possessing)—“what everybody says is so well worth seeing, must, of course,

be so. But," she added, with a blush—one which was born of the consciousness that to visit the show under Colonel Temple's escort would be to her a very agreeable change—"I have not been in the gardens yet, and——"

"Won't you come now, then?" he said, almost eagerly, his usual *poco-curante* manner disappearing for an instant under the spur of necessities which had of late grown to be very inconveniently pressing.

Laura—one of the least conventional of modern young ladies—having by a little bow, and a radiant smile, evinced her willingness to agree to this off-handed proposal, was moving (with its originator walking with apparent carelessness by her side) away, when Hartwell Davison, stepping audaciously forward, said :

"I beg pardon, Miss Ripley, but you have, I think, forgotten that my aunt and uncle appointed us to meet them here, and, in this crowd——"

"Ah! yes, I remember. How stupid of me," Laura said, her cheek colouring more vividly

even than before with anger, *this* time, as well as with a more young-lady-like emotion. "But where are they? I don't see them." And after looking in vain on either side for Mr. Davison's grey head, and Mrs. Thelwall's rather *voyante toilette* (a costume that was topped by a kind of shuttlecock feather on a small scale, which adorned her unmistakably London-made bonnet), "I think," she added with a little laugh, "that Mrs. Thelwall, too, must have been seized with a fancy to see the flowers."

"Most likely," chimed in Conrad. "And as it will never do to lose this transient glimpse of sunshine, would it not be better if this—this gentleman——"

"Mr. Hartwell Davison," Lolo reluctantly said, whilst Conrad, who could *look* the impertinences to which he refrained from giving voice as well as most men, continued, with the most slight and distant of bows, his—to one of the party, at least—most unwelcome suggestion—

"I was thinking," he said, "that if Mr. Hartwell would have the kindness—I hope"—with the

slight touch of the hat which said, as plainly as touch could speak, that he intended outward courtesy to an *inferior*—"I hope that I am not taking a liberty—but, by remaining on the spot, you could explain—when they return—to your friends that Miss Ripley has gone——"


"With Colonel Temple," Laura added, finishing, at last, the introductions which, under difficulties, she had begun, "to the Terrace. The day is so fine," she was beginning, but a look of impatience from Conrad, together with her own dislike to anything bearing even the semblance of an excuse for her conduct, to the forward, under-bred man beside her, checked the words upon her tongue, and caused her, with more evident alacrity than was perhaps quite consistent with conventional rules of breeding, to "suit the action to the word."

Hart Davison—his *air conquérant* for the moment vanished, and the wound which his self-esteem and vanity had sustained, bleeding inwardly—stood, for a moment or two, watching the pair, as they briskly threaded their way



through the crowd, in the opposite direction to that in which Laura had been looking—with not very eager eyes, it must be owned—for her chaperon.

Short as had been the colloquy between that “confounded swaggering fellow” (as Hart mentally styled one of the least jactant and pretentious-in-manner members of the Household Brigade), and the heiress who—prior to the advent of the interloper—he (Hart) had, in his own opinion, been “getting on so well with,” Mr. Davison had seen—for, to do him justice, he was, in such matters, quick enough of comprehension—not only that “the fellow” was “making running” with the heiress, but that Laura—probably because *he* had been “first in the field,” and she had seen nobody better (Mr. Hartwell Davison not having *then* had the opportunity *de se faire valoir* in her eyes), had given some sort of encouragement—“girls are so ready to be spooned” to the certainly not ill-looking—Hart could not help owning that—but probably impecunious aspirer to her hand.



The quiet insolence, the air of conscious superiority, a superiority of the kind and degree which is totally incontestable, was gall and wormwood to the disappointed man; whilst the advisableness suggested by Colonel Temple of his (Hart to wit) becoming, for the nonce, and evidently in furtherance of the speaker's designs, a sort of animated finger-post, was precisely the kind of affront which, to an individual of limited intelligence, is the most difficult of endurance.

“By G—!” he exclaimed, starting suddenly from the bench on which, in utter disgust, he had thrown himself, “if I don't make him pay for it one of these days, that's all!”

There were those who, in another country than this, had known enough of what Hartwell Davison was capable, to feel tolerably certain, had they been within hearing of this resolve, that the man was more than likely to keep his word.

## CHAPTER IV.

“ I DIDN'T like to say so before that man, Miss Ripley; but the truth is that I came here to-day on purpose, if I could, to see *you*.”

“ I am glad of that. I like my friends to remember me. I mean—” hesitating, and (ah! that foolish, betraying trick of hers!) blushing furiously—“that I should be sorry if——”

“ I hope you do not want me to consider that we are not friends,” Conrad, in a tone which was clearly intended to imply that in his simple question a deeper meaning lay concealed, demanded.

“ Oh! no, indeed not that,” she answers frankly; and then, suddenly remembering that

she had promised and vowed to herself to be never again, if she knew it, the dupe of a designing man, Lolo adds with, as she thinks, a tolerable show of womanly dignity, "I was only thinking——"

"That I had been a pretty considerably long time in remembering that I had friends, and kind ones, too, in London, who, being in trouble, might naturally feel hurt that the fellow who had been only too glad to come to their house when it was a cheerful one, could behave like a brute when circumstances, and very sad ones, too—almost the saddest I have ever known—made such a dreary change in their way of living necessary." Conrad, seeing that his companion has no words ready at command continues, "May I hope—is it too great presumption on my part to do so—that you have sometimes thought of me in this way?"

In spite of those serious vows and promises of hers, Laura could not help smiling at Colonel Temple's odd way of putting the matter.

"You would not like anyone to think you

what you call a 'brute,' I am sure of that, Colonel Temple," she said; "but I don't deny, I cannot, that I have felt you were unkind to forget us so. I suppose, however," she continued, making an effort to speak *don't-care-ishly*, "that it is the way of the world; only not having had very much to do with those ways, they surprise, and perhaps vex me more than they otherwise would do."

Conrad, after this, was silent long enough to excite some little wonder in Laura's breast. What could he be thinking of? Had *she*, in her ignorance of the fitness of things, said something so *very* abnormal that Colonel Temple, who was usually fluent enough of speech, felt really puzzled how to answer her? She had almost made up her mind that this was the case, when, in a tone far more serious than that in which he had hitherto spoken, he said,

"I wonder if I might speak to you quite openly? May I? It is a risk; but I am a bad hand at—what shall I call it?—humbugging. I fancy—am I right?—that you are one of the

few women in the world who like to be told the truth ?”

He paused for an answer, and Laura, having made some sort of incoherent reply to the effect that she thought and hoped that she loved light rather than darkness, and that she would be glad to be spoken openly to by her interlocutor, Colonel Temple continued thus,

“I have been a greater fool, Miss Ripley, than you have any idea of, and bad as my prospects were two months ago, they are infinitely worse now.”

“I’m sorry for that,” murmured poor Laura, whose hopes of *something coming* were, at every word uttered by the man sauntering slowly by her side, growing fainter and more faint. And alas! he—this tantalising Guardsman—had never seemed to her so charming. Perhaps it was by contrast with that “odious” Hartwell Davison, or—Well, the why and the wherefore did not much signify. It would all be over soon. This would be her last walk, her last *tête-à-tête* talk with Conrad Temple, and then—

"My dear Miss Ripley, what are you thinking of?"

The voice seemed—and yet it was that of the man who had so lately spoken, and whose coat-sleeve almost touched that of her seal-skin jacket—like one afar off, so distantly into the gloomy future had her swift-winged thoughts carried her. Startled and confused, she looked up quickly, and Conrad saw at a glance that her eyelashes were wet with tears.

"What a goose you must think me!" she exclaimed, as she brushed them away with her small and beautifully-gloved hand. "I am always so stupid when I think of my friends being in trouble. You'll tell me—won't you?—what yours is. It is a comfort sometimes, I think, to talk about one's grievances."

He looked at her searchingly for a few moments, and then said,

"I am afraid you will consider mine rather commonplace and uninteresting, for they are all more or less connected with money."

"Or the want of it," she broke in quietly.

"Most of the unhappiness, and a great deal of the wickedness of the world appears to me to be caused by people not having enough to live upon."

"It is genteel poverty that is the fatal thing. Genteel poverty, and, in my father's opinion, the *law of entail*. And he is right in some respects; and yet, but for that same law, Temple Court, which has been in the possession of our family for I don't know how many generations, would have been put up to auction long ago, and——"

"Ah! that would have been a pity. And you have been so right not to cut off the entail. You see," Laura added, apologetically, "that the secrets which are said to exist in all families are sometimes secrets no longer. Perhaps I am wrong, though, and there is no truth in the commonly-received report that Mr. Temple is constantly urging you to join with him in cutting off the entail of the property, which must be, in your eyes, of such inestimable value."



Conrad laughed ironically at the grandiloquent phrase (Laura, like many other impulsive young people, was rather apt to deal in superlatives) which had slipped from his companion's tongue.

"If you could form," he said, "the slightest idea, not only of the extent to which Temple Court is mortgaged, and of the difficulty, yearly increasing, which my father finds in paying the interest of the debt, you would perhaps wonder less (but how good you are to let me talk to you in this way!) not only at my father's urgings, but at my persistent refusal to listen to his entreaties."

"I am afraid I should still think you right. In your case, were it mine, I should feel as you do, and would rather do anything than alienate from me a beautiful place and property, of which I should be so proud!"

"*Anything!*" repeated Colonel Temple, meaningly. "That is a large order."

"Oh! take it as my way of speaking," she said a little impatiently; but Conrad, without

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heeding the interruption, went on with the sentence he had begun :

“A large order, but would it include (don’t think me too impertinent for asking the question) the sacrifice of your own self-respect, and the opinion—— But that is a minor consideration, and, after all, money makes everything square—of the world by marrying—but pshaw! what am I thinking of? As if there could be the slightest parallel between the cases! A woman may, without degradation, without loss of what is called independence, owe everything, even her very means of existence, to her husband ; whilst a man—— Miss Ripley,” and he spoke with an energy very unusual with him, “I cannot describe to you the contempt I feel for a fellow who, being penniless—ay, and probably worse than penniless—marries a rich wife, and lives a jolly, idle life upon her income.”

Laura, though in much inward agitation (for to her thinking it was now very evident in what direction the conversation was tending),

had sufficient command over herself to, without any betrayal of emotion, remark that, seeing what a very common thing marrying for money was, a good many fellows must, she feared, come under the ban of Colonel Temple's contempt.

"A contempt in which no one would join more readily than you. Am I not right, Miss Ripley?"

Thus urged, what could Laura say? It was a strange position in which to find herself, and for a moment she felt angry with Conrad for having placed her in it. She answered, however, with her usual frankness; but the sparkle in her eyes betrayed that she was, so to speak, turning at bay.

"There are men," she said, "who would be always despicable, let them do, or leave undone, what they would; whilst others—Ah! Colonel Temple, surely money is not the only, or even the chief good? Surely those who are not despicable—whose motives are not mercenary, and whose honour is unimpeachable—

must have *something*—a something—it may be, far more precious than an income”—speaking with great contempt and a curling lip the harmless polysyllable—“to bring in exchange for the wife’s miserable thousands?”

Miserable thousands! Again poor Lolo’s big, incongruously-chosen words went near to making Conrad Temple smile, but he checked the impulse, as he said, in his accustomed tranquil tones—

“I suppose my father must have laboured under the same delusion—I beg your pardon—must have been of the same opinion, for he has always insisted—his wish being, I suppose, father to the thought, for it was never much in his line to make a pigeon of his crow—that I might, if I chose, marry money. As to *loving* the owner of that money, *that* never seemed once to occur to him. If I wouldn’t—so my revered parent has told me fifty times—join him in cutting off the entail of Temple Court, the only alternative left to me was—the one we are discussing.”

"And you haven't been able to do it? How thoroughly right of you!" exclaimed Laura, stoutly; yet there were tears in her voice, and had she been alone, the girl would, methinks, then and there have sobbed aloud, in the bitterness of her pain and mortification.

It was well, both for herself and Conrad, that the suspicion that he might surmise how it was with her, never so much as crossed Laura Ripley's mind. Could she have looked for a single moment into his breast, and read there the man's entire certainty that the woman would not, as he asked her, say him nay, the course of Laura Ripley's life would, in all human probability, have run the risk of being totally changed thereby.

Entirely oblivious of the consideration which was due to those in whose company she had on that day wended her way to her "Fate," Laura, with Colonel Temple, "nothing loth," beside her, had wandered far from the spot where, as she had instructed Mr. Hart Davison to say, she and her *pro tem.* companion would be found.

Glancing back and around him, Conrad, convinced that, for the moment, at least, no human forms, divine or otherwise, were near, and that, therefore, time and opportunity were favourable to his wishes, drew nearer to the girl whom he had been, not without design, tormenting, and said, in a low and very earnest tone—

“May I leave off speaking in parables?—may I tell you, what perhaps you will have already guessed, that you are the woman with the aid of whose fortune my father hopes to patch up the crumbling edifice which is so nearly falling about our ears—that you are the woman who——”

“Ah! say no more, Colonel Temple. Pray let us turn back. What your object in telling me this can be, I know not. I have neither felt nor shown any curiosity to learn the secrets of your family, and I think I might have been spared——”

“This ‘glaring impertinence’—is not *that* what you would say? But, Miss Ripley, have

patience with me just a little longer, and then think of me leniently, if you can."

Even as Conrad had expected, Laura showed herself amenable to reason. With a slight but decidedly haughty motion of the head, she gave him, as he chose to consider it, the permission for which he craved; and as their faces were once more turned away from the huge building, with its ever-moving crowd of holiday pleasure-seekers, Colonel Temple made the most of his time, as follows :

"When first my father advised me—don't be shocked, Miss Ripley—old men will, you know, be old men, and my respected parent is the last person in the world likely to forego his privilege. When first my father, then—as I was about to say—advised me to be First in the Field where so many were sure to run for the great prize, the notion struck me as too preposterous to be entertained for a moment. I cannot tell you," he continued, drawing a long breath, "when it was that, in spite of those settled prejudices of mine, with which I have been boring you, I first began

to entertain the belief that under *some* circumstances (if I could make you love me, in short, Laura) the sense of degradation in marrying a rich woman would be forgotten, and the loss of self-esteem be less painfully felt."

She did not answer him either by word or look. The glow which anger had called up into her cheek was burning there still, nor as yet, so the girl told herself, had Colonel Temple uttered a single word that *ought* to *tell* in his behalf.

Seeing that she was resolutely silent, Conrad had no alternative but that of continuing, as best he could, his pleading.

"The wish (it has never yet been a hope) was the consequence of my own altered feelings, my own gradually growing admiration and love. I could not be so much as I was with you at Holly Combe, without discovering that a home with you must perforce be a happy one. When in your presence I felt the charm of your brightness, your sweet-temper, and your unselfishness; whilst away from you there was the want, the vacuum which convinced me that for the first time



in my life I was really, thoroughly in love!"

"And yet," said Laura, who had been quick to perceive that it had been solely of her moral qualities that this singular suitor had, in his enumeration of her good gifts, spoken, "you could go away when we—when poor Sir Miles was in his greatest trouble, and," she added, failing to notice how every word she uttered was a virtual acceptance of her lover's suit, "you could remain absent—in Paris, we have heard"—with a slight toss of her small head, "for six weeks, and more. Sir Miles was very hurt, and often said that he had thought you had come to consider yourself more a friend than an acquaintance."

"But I wrote—surely my letter reached you. I am not much of a scribbler," he added, "and besides—for I had better confess everything at once, and risk the consequences—I was fearfully in debt, and could not venture, without running the risk of being arrested, to show myself in England."

If Conrad Temple had feared that this announcement would injure his cause with the

heiress, he was mistaken. The frankness of the avowal, when he *might*, at least so reasoned Laura, have kept the extent of his impecuniosity from her, spoke highly in his favour, and a more convincing proof that the disinterestedness of his attachment was above suspicion could not, in her opinion, be adduced. Colonel Temple's conscience in this matter was evidently too nobly clear for any alarm, lest the knowledge of his sore straits should breed suspicion of his motives in Miss Ripley's breast, to enter his mind.

"I am so sorry," she said kindly, "and if I had thought that my stupid questions and reproaches——"

"Ah, don't say that you regret them, Laura! They have given me hope—hope that senseless, selfish spendthrift though I have been, you will not refuse to take my possible regeneration in hand. And you will believe," getting possession of the small fingers which certainly did not appear to resist the firm but gentle pressure of his, "dearest, that I never, if I had not loved you, would have asked you to be my wife? I


have nothing but that love to offer in return for all the benefits which you have it in your power to bestow on me, but——”

“Ah, do not talk of benefits! I hate my money! I would give it all for love——”

“Which is yours without such a costly sacrifice; and, Laura, if you would only trust me, I will do my best, in spite of all I shall owe you, to make you happy.”

She looked up at him with a bright smile—a smile in which consent was plainly written—and was about to speak, when a certain crimson velvet mantle, flanked by a portly figure, which Laura recognised at once as belonging to her neglected friends, suddenly appeared in the offing.

“One word. I can bear anything better than suspense,” whispered Conrad, with an eagerness which served him well. And, judging from the well-phrased expression of his handsome face, when, a few minutes afterwards, he might have been seen leaving the still well-filled Palace on his return to London, Conrad Temple had



not pleaded in vain for the "one word" which was to make him, as he had brought himself to believe, a happy man.

## CHAPTER V.

IT is early Autumn time again, for nearly a year has passed away since we left Conrad Temple, an engaged man, and Laura, as completely happy a young woman as ever, in the ignorance which is bliss, prepared to enter on the holy estate of matrimony.

The heiress had at first, after the fashion of promised brides, shown herself in no hurry to abridge the time, the most delicious of all seasons, which a woman (I speak of the sentimental of her sex), can ever know, that must in most cases elapse between the betrothal and the binding ceremony which takes from even the best endowed of women the mastership of herself.

“We will not say anything yet to poor Sir Miles,” Laura took an early opportunity of suggesting to Conrad. “He is so unhappy!—has so much to make him low-spirited! and he would fancy—quite a mistake, for I don’t intend to be hurried, sir, one bit—that I shall be found missing some day, and he will have nobody—poor man!—to make his tea for him.”

Conrad, who, although he had said no more than the truth when he affirmed that he had grown very fond of Lolo, was certainly not inconveniently in love, submitted, with a good grace, to the behests of his betrothed that, for a short season, their engagement should remain a secret. If there *were* circumstances over which, for the present, Colonel Temple had no control, that necessitated the existence of a few exceptions to the rule, Lolo was far too sensible a woman not to fully understand that so it must be. To make any advances *before* marriage towards settling the Colonel’s *little* accounts, would have been to evince an absence of tact on Miss Ripley’s part, of which that young person never would

have been guilty; but to let it be known, *sub rosa*, that the tide of Colonel Temple's affairs had been taken at the flood, and would, far more than probably, lead on to fortune, was another affair altogether; and Laura was glad, in an utterly unboastful, unsuspected way, to act the part of fairy godmother to her future husband.

It especially amused Lolo—for she was quick at discovering such things, and though she kept her suspicions to herself, the fact that Mr. Hart Davison had designs upon her purse had long been patent to her—to draw a mental picture of the banker's surprise when the fact of her engagement to Colonel Temple should be announced. For that Mr. Davison, senior, was a warm partisan of Hart's, and keenly desirous of his success, Laura felt very certain; and had her liking for her elderly friend been—which it certainly was not—what it had once been, Laura would have probably, as she dwelt in anticipation on his disappointment, have been visited with some slight pangs of remorse.

Stimulated—as much by Dr. Fleming's ad-

vice, as by his own love of cheerful society—Sir Miles, whose naturally elastic mind was beginning to rally from the violent shock which his wife's sudden insanity had caused him, entered, prompted, after that ever memorable day at the Crystal Palace, by his guest, far more readily than he had done before, into such mild amusements as are to be enjoyed in London in the cold, foggy month of November. He rode on horseback almost daily with Laura, and whether their steps led them to Rotten Row, or farther afield to Richmond Park, or to the (now *brown*) lanes which, outside the suburbs of northern London, do still abound, one equestrian, Conrad Temple, to wit, generally contrived to accompany them. At first, so strong had already in kind-hearted Sir Miles grown the habit of dwelling exclusively on his own affairs, his own griefs and trials, the constantly recurring circumstance of Colonel Temple "turning up" at the least-to-be-looked-for times, as an additional escort to the heiress, failed to excite the slightest wonder in the Baronet's



breast. He (Conrad) had been in the country their constant visitor; as a familiar friend he might, even in those days, have been considered, for with the license granted everywhere, save in large cities, he would drop in at unexpected times, nor wait for a repetition of his visits till the proper season for doing so had come round. The effect which London air and London habits are apt to produce upon intimacies commenced in the balmy freshness and amongst the green trees and smooth sward of God's blessed country, formed one afternoon, during the course of a pleasant ride through the glades of Richmond Park, subject for discussion between Sir Miles Grafton and his young companions; and it was during that short conversation that the former first began to suspect the true state of things between Colonel Temple and the heiress.

As they approached—riding at a foot's pace—the Roehampton entrance to the Park, an open carriage, in which were seated two ladies, one young, and the other of “mature” age, passed


them at the rapid trot of two magnificent carriage horses. That the occupants of the landaulet were not unknown to Conrad, was evidenced by the formal bows by which the courteous lifting of his hat was returned.

"What a pretty girl!" exclaimed Laura; to which remark Sir Miles, in a far less enthusiastic tone, added,

"And what a very unpleasant-looking chaperon! Who are they, Temple? "You don't appear to be very much in their good graces—eh?"

"Anything but that," laughed Temple. "The girl, Miss Granard, is, as you say, Miss Ripley, pretty and attractive-looking, and her mother appeared to be, when nearly two months ago I spent a week under the same roof (Lord Preston's roof to wit) with her and her daughter, as good-natured as—and that is not saying a little—she is stout. We were a jolly party—*parties* always are—I don't mean to speak *slang*—at Oakfield, and, as is always the case in a single man's house, there was a *laissez-aller*, an

agreeable familiarity, established amongst us, which we all, myself included" (Laura's merry look of pretended anger, as she shook her coral-handled riding-whip in playful menace at the speaker, was remembered afterwards, when Sir Miles came to put two and two together, by that hitherto unobservant gentleman, and smiled at accordingly), "which we all, myself included," repeated Conrad, audaciously, "found extremely to our tastes. Now, however, comes the pith of the story, from which two truths may be gathered—first, that no man should presume, in London, on intimacies, however close, which have commenced in the wholesome freedom of a well-ordered country house; and, secondly, that an impecunious poor devil like me has no right, under any circumstances, to presume at all. Yesterday, hearing that the Granards were in town, I called in the gloaming—the pleasantest time (eh, Miss Ripley, is it not, when the lamps have not been brought in, and the fire does not burn *too* brightly?) for conversation, and thought, short-sighted mortal



that I was, that I should, remembering the old days at Oakfield, be welcome as flowers in May, when, to my dismay—don't laugh, that is *too* cruel—they received me as if—well, as if I had been a young man from Swan and Edgars', who had called to have his bill paid."

Laura laughed, and forgetting for the first time the rules of caution which she had laid down for her guidance, she exclaimed, in merry haste,

"Oh, you poor Con! Only fancy! What *did* you do?"

"Simply nothing, except look foolish. A woman, under similar circumstances, would, of course, have looked more than usually wise," said Conrad, who had noticed the *lapsus linguæ* of which his affianced one had been guilty, and was secretly enjoying the conviction that she was not, on the present occasion, carrying herself with that *aplomb* for which an older and more self-sustained woman might have rendered herself remarkable.

With an effort, however (but it was one

which a single glance either at Conrad's laughing or Sir Miles's serious face might have rendered nugatory), Laura recovered herself sufficiently to join in the topic which was under discussion, leaving, as she did so, her own unguarded slip of the tongue to stand aside for after consideration.

"It certainly," she said, "is very true, and equally wonderful, that people who have been in the country chief friends are separated in London by the invisible barrier of—*what*, it would be hard to say, but asking or not asking to dinner, has, I think, a great deal to do with it," Miss Ripley added, musingly.

Sir Miles laughed.

"I am not at all sure that you have made even half a bad guess," he said. "London dinners are no more things to be lightly undertaken than the morning visits of country mice—no offence to you, Temple—are certain to be always acceptable to town ditto. Hospitality in the rural districts entails comparatively so few after-consequences, whereas—" but a glance

at his audience making it sufficiently apparent that the two who formed it, having fallen slightly astern, were far less occupied with his dissertation on modern social tactics than with one another, Sir Miles—mentally deciding that he would for the future keep his eyes more widely open to what was going on around him—proposed, as the short November day was waning fast, that they should urge their horses into a canter.

“It was Laura’s wish, not mine, I give you my word for *that*, Grafton. She was afraid, poor girl, that the news of her engagement might cause you some extra worry; and, as she doesn’t intend to marry till her mother has been dead two years——”

“Do you think that Davison—that banker fellow, you know, who manages Laura Ripley’s affairs—has any suspicion of what is going on?” interrupted Sir Miles, who had already expressed his somewhat qualified approval of his guest’s love-match, and was now, in that dullest

of dens—to wit, the small back ground-floor sitting-room in Welbeck Place—talking over with Colonel Temple the particulars of the great event.

“Well—no, I fancy not; but why do you ask? He is no connection—not even a particular friend.”

“True, but I have a sort of idea—why, I cannot say, but so it is—that Davison has it in him to be a very *particular* enemy, if he should be annoyed or thwarted by Miss Ripley’s marriage, and——”

“But how?—in what way? I really cannot understand,” said Conrad, impatiently, “in what manner his possible enmity—the possible enmity of such a snob as that—can affect Miss Ripley. It seems too absurd even to talk about it.”

“So it does, I agree with you there; and yet, strange as it may seem, I cannot altogether shake off a certain uncomfortable inward feeling that Mr. Davison’s enmity *might* injure Laura. Ask me either to explain or account for this feeling, and I tell you frankly that it is wholly

out of my power. Perhaps it is the expression of the man's face, which to me is simply odious, or his manner, which is, if possible, more odious still, that are at the bottom of the repulsion, mingled with, as I told you before, a vague misgiving that he has it in his power to injure Laura, which I am conscious of entertaining as regards that smooth-spoken, under-bred man."

Colonel Temple, a young man, vigorous of nerve, and one of the furthest possible from being able to enter into the morbid fancies, as he mentally termed them, of poor harassed Sir Miles, nevertheless refrained from openly combating a notion which he probably believed to be the offspring of a diseased and over-excited imagination.

"The poor fellow has shut himself up so long with his mad wife that he is getting queer in the upper story," was his mental comment on the Baronet's words; whilst he contented himself with saying, politely,

"I suppose there is no accounting for those fancies. I never had them myself, but I



believe, from what I hear, that they are not uncommon. But you said something about old Davison, *à propos* of my marriage. Do you imagine"—with a slight sneer—"the banker will do me the honour to object to it?"

"Well, yes. *There* you *do* ask me a question which I can answer. From what I have seen (little enough, you will say, but in this case I have had my wits about me) I feel tolerably certain that Walter Davison has set his mind upon bringing about a marriage between his nephew (as he wishes Hartwell Davison to pass for being) and Laura Ripley."

"You don't mean to say so? Well, that is something like impudence! But I *can't* think it," he added, immediately. "The notion is something too preposterous."

"You forget that the 'gods have not the giftie gi'en us, to see ourselves as others see us.' It is just possible——"

"That this ambitious individual may express equal surprise—when he is made aware of it—at *my* presumption?" laughed Conrad. "No-

thing more likely. As you say, we are all of us tolerably blind to our own defects, and the fellow is very likely not worse off than I am, while he has (I will answer for that) fewer debts to hamper him. The heir entail to lauded property, however heavily it may be encumbered, finds it so awfully easy to get tic, and——”

“Well, well, it is something to have the broad acres, however much they may be encumbered, to the fore still,” said Sir Miles, cheerfully; for he was Conservative to the backbone, and any lien which a creditor might have upon an old family estate struck vaguely on his somewhat narrow understanding, as an infringement of the rights of property. For something approaching to the same reason, likewise, he perceived little save what was advantageous and desirable for Laura in the marriage under contemplation. Colonel Temple had shown himself to be something of a spendthrift, it was true, but that was the only charge which could be brought against him; and, so Sir Miles wound up the dialogue between himself and the bride-

groom by saying, that some of Miss Ripley's thousands could not be better employed than in freeing beautiful Temple Court from the mortgages with which it had so long and so disastrously been saddled.

Whilst this conversation was being carried on in the basement story of the old Welbeck Place mansion, Laura Ripley, in her own apartment, situated several flights of stairs higher, was suffering from one of the now not unfrequent nervous headaches to which, since the terrible affliction that had befallen the unfortunate mistress of the house, she had been subject. The past night, in consequence of an unusual amount of disturbance in the room beneath, had brought with it little or no sleep for Laura Ripley; and now, with shattered nerves, and a growing conviction in her mind that some change, and that an immediate one, in her mode of life was becoming absolutely necessary, she was dreamily considering how that change was to be effected, when a letter was brought to her by her maid.

"There isn't any answer wanted, 'm," said the abigail, who was much attached to her good-natured, open-handed young mistress. "So, if you think it would make your head worse, I wouldn't read it, 'm, if I was you."

"Thanks, Martin, but my head can't be much worse, I think, so give me the letter, please, and then I'll try to sleep. I will ring when I want you."

Instead of complying with this evident hint at her own departure, Mistress Martin began moving about, with restless fingers, the various articles with which her young lady's toilet-table was strewed. That she had, however, something on her mind of sufficient importance (in her own opinion) to justify her proceedings, was speedily manifested by her saying, with an awkward consciousness which, but for the pain she was enduring, would have made Laura smile.

"The Colonel's downstairs, 'm, with Sir Miles, and has been there for an hour and more."

After which announcement, Martin, probably

taking much credit to herself for doing as she would be done by, beat a sudden retreat, leaving her mistress to her reflections.

The letter, which Laura found herself quite capable, not only of reading carefully, but of “noting its contents” with perspicuity and composure, proved to be from the banker, and ran as follows:—

“MY DEAR MISS RIPLEY,

“As an old and trusted friend of your late lamented uncle’s, I venture to hope that in claiming to be considered by you as something more than a mere everyday acquaintance, I am not taking what you will consider a liberty. As a person, too, old enough to be your father, and with a knowledge of the world so greatly exceeding your own, you will, I feel persuaded, grant at least a patient hearing to the advice which, with considerable reluctance, be assured (but then ‘duty before inclination’ has ever, I trust, been my motto), I have decided to offer you. That the said advice cannot

be considered altogether disinterested, as, in the event of your following it, *I* should in some respects be immeasurably a gainer, is a contingency which *must* not deter me from doing, even at this possible risk, what my conscience tells me is *right*. But enough, my dear Miss Ripley, of this long exordium, and to the point, which is this, namely, that in my opinion—an opinion which is, I find, also that of the world in general—your present home is one which on every account it is advisable that you should exchange for another. In the innocence and purity of your own heart and mind, the wickedness of the world, and of the society in which we live, must to you be as a sealed book; but, my dear young friend, at the risk of bringing the blush of offended modesty to your cheek, I must remind you that Sir Miles Grafton is still, comparatively speaking, a young man.” (Laura, in spite of her nervous headache, laughed a little to herself at the notion of dear old bachelor-looking Sir Miles, with his straight, closely-cut grey hair, and his homely, inexpressive fea-

tures, being, by even the most imaginatively wicked person, considered either youthful or dangerous.) “Sir Miles,” she resumed, “is, comparatively speaking, still a young man, and such being the case, it is certainly neither prudent nor advisable that you, at your age, and—pardon me for venturing to speak openly—with your attractions, should continue to reside, without a female chaperon, under the roof of our afflicted friend. The world, as I need not tell you, *will* talk, and that its comments are not *always* charitable, you may yourself have noted. Under these circumstances, I have—perhaps imprudently—deemed it the part of a friend—may I not also venture to add, of a *guardian*?—to warn you of the peril you are running, the peril, that is, of finding—for so slight and innocent a cause—the tongues of gossip busy with your name.

“Whilst calling your attention to this, in my opinion, important subject, my sister, Mrs. Thelwall, begs me to add that she and her family intend passing the next six weeks (all

the period, in short, whilst home changes are being made at Birkworth Castle) in Chichester Gate, and that she will be only too delighted to receive you as her guest. May I add that your acceptance of my sister Caroline's invitation would give most unfeigned pleasure to

“Yours most sincerely,

“WALTER DAVISON.”

It was characteristic of Laura Ripley that, after carefully reading this long and suggestive letter, she, instead of consulting anyone on the matter, not only wrote her answer at once, but despatched the short and comprehensive missive without delay or hesitation to the post.

The wording of her reply was as follows :—

“DEAR MR. DAVISON,

“Thank you *so* much, as well for the kind advice contained in your letter, as for the cordial invitation with which it closes. I had already given my mind very seriously to the subject regarding which you write, and have



much satisfaction in telling you that, having promised to marry, without any unnecessary delay, Colonel Temple of Temple Court, the responsibility of mounting guard over my reputation will rest henceforth on *his* shoulders. The fact of my suffering at this moment very severely from headache will, I trust, be considered by you as an adequate excuse for the brevity of this reply. Pray present my kind regards and excuses to Mrs. Thelwall, and believe me to remain

“Yours faithfully,

“LAURA RIPLEY.”

To dwell upon the dismay and indignation felt, and in the privacy of his family evinced, by the banker, on the receipt of this letter, would be uninteresting and unprofitable. But, although furious at the failure of his cherished plans, Walter Davison was quite worldly-wise enough to understand that to give public vent to his feelings on the subject of Miss Ripley's announced marriage would be in the last degree

injudicious. Already had his interference in that wilful young person's concerns been productive of consequences which were the reverse of desirable; for the letter from which he had hoped so much had, as, two days later, Laura frankly and laughingly told him, the effect of hurrying on her marriage.

"I am not bold enough," she said, "to fly in the face of a censorious public, and I am more obliged to you than I can tell for the part you have acted. But for you, poor, dear Sir Miles might—unfitted as he looks for the part—have been the hero of all sorts of tea-table gossip, which, as it is,——"

"You did not, I hope," the banker, with a forced laugh, said, "open Sir Miles's eyes to the risk he was running?"

"Indeed I did. Prudent people may hold to the proverb, 'Least said, soonest mended,' but I am for speaking out. By thoroughly ventilating a subject the chaff gets separated from the grain; and, in short, one knows what one is about."

“And what, if I may be allowed to ask, is Miss Ripley about now?”

“Well, nothing of any consequence just at present,” laughed Laura, “except winding this troublesome skein of silk, and answering the questions of my always good-natured friend Mr. Walter Davison. That which, however, I expect very shortly to be doing, is buying my wedding clothes; for, you see, more good than you could have guessed at has sprung out of your letter. Sir Miles is such a creature of habit that the notion of “getting along,” as the Yankees say, without having me within reach, is so distressing to him that he has actually made up his mind—such a good thing, is it not?—to follow Dr. Fleming’s advice about poor Lady Grafton. Of course it will be an effort and a wrench, and all that kind of thing——”

“But—pardon me for interrupting you—I do not *quite* see the connection between your marrying in—in such rather extraordinary haste, and this tardy resolution of our friends——”

“Ah! That is because I talk so much, and

so quickly, and never stop to explain. You see, Sir Miles has been almost a second father to me."

"Suppose we call him the third," said Mr. Davison, with something like a sneer in his voice, though Laura would have found it hard, had she been called upon to do so, to decide whether he was in jest or earnest. "I hope, my dear Miss Ripley, that you will not consider the imagined relationship an altogether unwarrantable liberty on my part; but, ha, ha! excuse my laughing, such follies appear so absurd when they are looked back to; but I used to half consider myself as standing *in loco parentis* to the niece of my old friend, and——"

"Ah, I know you have been most kind," interrupted Laura, colouring up suddenly, as much, if not more, from a slight sense of displeasure at the tone in which the banker addressed her, as from any prickings of conscience which had been induced by the words themselves—"most kind, and I have given you nothing but trouble. As to my reason, however, for being in what

you consider so *extraordinary* a hurry to shake off the 'lordship' of myself, it is simply this—namely, that we—Colonel Temple and I, that is—can see, when we are married, much more of poor, dear Sir Miles than could possibly be the case (considering” with a merry glance upward from the tangled skein into the banker's face, “how unsafe my present position is) if I were to remain single.”

They were sitting, one on each side the fireplace of that dull dining-like drawing-room, and the Autumn twilight was coming on apace. The whole aspect of the place was dreariness itself, and taken in conjunction with the fact—one which the imagination was wont to dwell on with a species of morbid tenacity—that above stairs was located one whom it had pleased Providence to afflict with the sorest calamity to which human nature is subjected, it is hardly surprising that to Walter Davison, as his eye rested on the rounded cheek, and the full, yet pliant form, so redolent of youth and health, the (to Laura) not very agreeable thought

should have occurred, that the first *he* who, in that melancholy home, had brought her

Day and night, day and night,  
Pleasant dreams and life and light,

could scarcely have failed in his desire of being accepted by the heiress as her husband. Then it was that he said to himself, even as had done Richard Temple of Temple Court to the wife of his bosom, "*There is nothing like being First in the Field;*" but brimful though he was of disappointment and vexation, he yet "carried his dish" so evenly that not a drop of the bitter liquid was permitted to run over in words; whilst the tones of his voice were still bland and cheerful, as he said, with as much show of interest as he could assume:

"And when, may I ask, is to be the happy day? And how about the settlements? A well-dowered young lady like you mustn't expect to get off without giving some work to the lawyers, and——"

"Oh!" said Laura, with a bright smile, and a still brighter flush—for, if the truth must be told,

she was a little ashamed of the confession which was to be extracted from her ; bankers were, as a rule, very matter-of-fact men, and from what she had seen of Mr. Davison, he was one of the last in the world likely to sympathize with the folly of risking all for love, and deeming, if the worst came to the worst, the "all" well lost—"Oh," she said, "the lawyers are not likely to obtain many six-and-eightpences from me. You will think me a lunatic, I daresay, but I have quite made up my mind to have no marriage settlements at all."

"No marriage-settlements!" repeated Mr. Davison, slowly ; and, as he spoke, a pale but still bright ray of evening light (for the front windows of Sir Miles's big family mansion faced the West) shone upon the massive and usually inscrutable features of the speaker, causing Laura, whose eyes were at that moment fixed upon his face, to almost start with surprise at the singular expression which she noticed there.

Was it triumph, she asked herself, at the

too certain—as he would deem them—consequences of her purposed folly, which lent that strange cold glitter to his eyes, and curled his lip with something like a grin of scorn? Or could it be that the Iron Banker, as she had sometimes jestingly called him, was (having her interest at heart) really—truly vexed with her for the stupidly trusting step she meditated? This possibility kept her for a moment silent. Lolo was keenly alive to, and very grateful for, *real* kindness, and it half distressed her to so drive in the nail of conviction as to still further pain and disappoint her visitor. At last, after a pause which Mr. Davison seemed determined not to break, she said—

“I have great faith in entire trust. ‘Trust me not at all, or all in all,’—I so thoroughly enter into that feeling; besides,” she added, with rather a conscious little laugh, “it is a sort of salvo to the dignity of a man, who is driven, poor fellow! to marry an heiress——”

She was interrupted by a loud laugh (one at least that was louder certainly than the laws of



good-breeding warranted) from the banker, as he rose to take leave.

“My dear Miss Ripley, pray excuse me,” he said, “but you really have the oddest way of putting things! The idea of pitying a man for being *driven* to marry a charming woman possessed of two hundred thousand pounds!—ha, ha! But I really must go. Past four o’clock,” looking at his watch, “I declare!”

And then they shook hands and parted.

Laura kept to her resolution. She dispensed with settlements, and, to the great satisfaction of the Temple family generally (the delight of Richard of that ilk, verged, as Conrad said, on the degrading), she was quietly married, on the twenty-fifth of November, to the man whom, in spite of all remonstrances to the contrary, she insisted upon trusting not only with herself, but with her property.

The ten months which have elapsed before we find the still well-contented-with-one-another pair, paying, during the sporting month of September, a visit at Temple Court, have been

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chiefly passed by Conrad and his wife abroad. Sir Miles Grafton's unhappy wife is still the inhabitant of a lunatic asylum, where she employs her time—perhaps not altogether unhappily—in nursing a big doll, which she proudly imagines to be the infant for which she had so long been pining. The case is supposed to be incurable, and this chiefly owing to the fact that, for the reason probably that in her delusion she has found happiness, Lady Grafton's bodily health is perfect.

“There is a pleasure,” so says the poet, “in being mad, which only madmen know;” and that his poor wife may be cited as no exception to this rule (if rule indeed it be!), is a great consolation to Sir Miles. But his far greater source of comfort is the ever-near neighbourhood of cheerful, sweet-natured Laura Temple—Laura, who, whilst she was “the real cause” of her husband's leaving the army, had tact and cleverness enough to make him imagine that that sensible and economic measure not only originated in his own brain, but was born of his

own prudence and newly-born powers of self-denial—Laura, who always contrived to do the right thing at the right time, and who never either said what she ought not to have said, or left unsaid what she ought to have given voice to. During their lengthened touring on the Continent, Mrs. Temple, far from showing any inclination to monopolize Conrad's society, had greatly encouraged Sir Miles's evident desire to be their companion by the way. He was very intelligent and well-informed—their "walking Murray," Colonel Temple called him; and what between his wife and his friend (the former of whom invariably pleaded ignorance of any subject regarding which Con ought to have been, but was not, well-informed), a good deal of stray information, picked up at odd times and seasons, got crammed into a brain which an Eton education had left somewhat more empty than Lolo deemed expedient. When, after he and Laura returned to England, Con rather astonished some of his former brother ignoramuses by his mental improvement, it never

once occurred to the travelled man that for by far the larger share of his adult education he was mainly indebted to his wife!

## CHAPTER VI.

COLONEL TEMPLE and his bride had been three days at Temple Court, beautiful, noble Temple Court, which now, through Laura's means, freed almost entirely from the liabilities under which it had so long groaned, seemed, in that sweet Autumn time—at least, so said Lolo to her blind brother-in-law—to be rearing its fair head more proudly above the many-tinted ancestral trees than ever.

"I am so glad," Reginald said to her, one soft Autumnal evening, as they sat together on a wooden seat, which encircled (like a gigantic bracelet) the stem of a spreading cedar on the lawn, "so *very* glad that you feel as we do

about Temple Court. Other places may—pshaw! they *must* be grander a thousand times, and finer in every way, but I hardly think that any could be more loveable. I suppose, though,” he added, raising his sightless eyes towards the massive building, on the many windows of which the setting sun was shining like burnished gold, “that we all love the places best which we have known familiarly as happy children. After all, what does a child care about mere beauty?”

“Not much, perhaps; and yet, as long as I live I shall associate my first feelings of admiration for the loveliness of form and colour with certain big red daises which grew in my grandfather’s Rectory garden in Devonshire. A little beauty, like a little size, goes a long way with children. I thought my grandfather’s house a very considerable one in those days, nearly as large, I daresay, as Temple Court, and with almost as many windows as the sun is shining on with such a lovely, yellow light——”

She was interrupted by an exclamation

from Reginald, whose quick ears had caught the distant sounds of carriage-wheels.

"Hush! Don't you hear?" he said, nervously. "*That* must be the dog-cart coming back with Guy."

Laura looked at him in surprise. She had heard nothing. To her all around was silence—the deep, concentrated silence of a dying day, the work of which is nearly done. And then Regy had spoken in such a strange, startled whisper. It was a recognized family fact that he was constitutionally, what is called "nervous"; but surely there could be nothing in his brother's coming to cause such a trembling in the voice, and such a vivid colouring in the pale, delicate face, as Lolo, to her wonderment, noticed now.

"I hear nothing. How quick your ears must be!" she was beginning, when, caught sight of on a sudden, through a distant opening among the trees, was the rapidly-advancing *proof* that Regy's ears had not deceived him.

"Let us go in," he said, weariedly; adding, however, immediately, for Regy was not given

to thinking solely of himself, "You don't mind, dear, do you? And besides, I am quite independent. Even mother trusts me everywhere by myself now."

Laura laughed lightly. A low, pleasant laugh it was, and one which, despite its frequency, did not contrast too strongly with the quietude (Conrad would have characterized it by a stronger term) which had so long reigned unbroken—save by occasional bursts of temper on the part of Richard Temple—in that large, scantily-inhabited house.

"Thanks," she said, rising as he had done from the circular bench on which they had been seated. "I have no doubt of your being thoroughly worthy of confidence, but as I don't happen to share, my dear Regy, your love of mooning about alone——"

"Halloo! You two!" exclaimed a cheery voice which made Reginald shrink and start, (Laura felt it was so, for she had linked her arm in his, and the involuntary action—for the voice was Conrad's—gave her a moment's unreasoning



vexation.) "I've been looking for you everywhere," he added; his handsome face flushed with his run up the rather steep ascent to the spot on which, midway between the level and the house, stood the spreading cedar-tree you wot of. "Old Guy will be here in five minutes. Don't you hear the trap? Here, catch hold, Redge! And Lo, what an awful old hat you have got on! Run away, and get yourself up—Guy will never believe I married for love," he added, laughing, when Laura, mindful, as usual, of his smallest and least reasonable requests, ran off to do his bidding. "He *couldn't*, you know, unless he saw Laura looking her best. She really does look quite handsome now sometimes."

"And never otherwise, I am sure, than bright and sweet-tempered."

"Yes—pretty well for that—Guy must own that I have drawn a prize there. So unselfish, and cheery, and unpretending! Nothing of the heiress about her——"

"Except the little pleasant fact of her having

money! Luckily, old fellow, the part of Hamlet was not left out in this case—not but what any man with common sense might think himself fortunate in gaining for his wife (even if she hadn't a shilling) such a woman as Laura."

"You take it for granted, I conclude," laughed Conrad, "that your man of common sense has something besides that good gift to make the pot boil? But there he is! There's Guy—how are you old fellow?" and the brothers, who had not met since Conrad's wedding-day, shook hands affectionately. The fingers too—on neither side very eagerly extended—of Reginald and Guy, met for a moment, and as they did so, Colonel Temple must, had he been a person given to closer observation, have perceived that the manner of both was constrained and abnormal; whilst, as was customary with him, when in the slightest degree pained or agitated, a hot flush of colour spread over Regy's cheek and brow.

"We expected you yesterday," were Conrad's first words, "and I could hardly get Lolo to be-

lieve me when I said that you would certainly have turned up *if you could* before. It's one of her pet theories that in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred a man *can* do what he likes to do."

"And as you have not certainly proved yourself to be the exception which proves the rule, perhaps Mrs. Con will identify that luckless individual with myself. For, truly as well as seriously, I found it utterly impossible to get away. Miss Bainbridge, who is always making arguments for going somewhere—except to kingdom come," he added coarsely, "insisted upon my staying to what she calls 'go into' her accounts with her. Such a nuisance! Accounts in which I am not in the slightest degree interested——"

"But you *may* be, you know, some day. Eh, old man?"

"God knows! All that *I* know is that I'm pretty nearly sick of it all. But to change the subject from me and my stupid concerns. How do you find everything and everybody looking here? Especially my father. We have all fan-

ced him a great deal altered, but seeing a person constantly, makes one a bad judge——”

“Well, I don’t know; I haven’t looked much at *him*,” said out-spoken Conrad; at which matter-of-fact remark even Regy (for the reason probably that the head of the house, with his sallow, peevish face and generally neglected person, had become of late years not an especially pleasant object on which to gaze) found it hard to resist a smile.

“And now, tell me what *you* think of her! I wrote you how wonderfully *we* consider her to be improved. Lolo was always nice, you know, but as to calling her a ‘beauty,’ *that* before her marriage never, I fancy, could have come into any one’s head——”

“And certainly not into Con’s! How well I remember his telling me that he would rather break stones on the road than tie himself for life to so ugly a girl as Laura Ripley.”

“Ah! it’s very easy to talk of breaking stones! The kind of thing that people are so

fond of saying, and, in nine cases out of ten, it simply means nothing at all, and therefore that sort of remark ought never to be either repeated or remembered."

Mrs. Temple—for the reason, chiefly, that Guy had obtained, partly from a supercilious *nil admirari* manner and mode of speech, the reputation, in his own family, of being a fastidious though unimpassioned judge of female attractions—had quite (poor simple woman) looked forward with pleasure to hearing the general opinion regarding Laura's greatly improved looks confirmed by Guy.

For this purpose she had taken advantage of the first opportunity that offered to put, without beating about the bush (such beating not being in Mrs. Temple's line), the question to which she so much desired to obtain an answer. And when the response came not, or rather when Guy's remarks betrayed, as his mother thought, a feeling, on his part, that was the reverse of amiable towards his brother, it needed all Mrs. Temple's habitual "allowance" for her second

son—allowance which was founded chiefly on the fact that he had been taken from *her* care in order to be reared under the fostering wing of Selina Bainbridge—to prevent Guy from hearing, for once in his life, his mother's voice speaking to him in accents of reproof.

She was not far wrong in supposing that the object of her suspicion and displeasure was bitterly jealous of Conrad's good-fortune. That same jealousy, however (an extenuating circumstance, of which Mrs. Temple was happily ignorant), had its growth far more in the keen and abiding sense of his own miserable failure than in his inward harpings on Conrad's success. He had intended, when he quoted to his mother that unlucky anti-matrimonial remark of imprudent Con's, no unkindness to his brother, and sought to make the best amends he could by saying in his most conciliating manner,

“A thousand pardons, my dear mother! I spoke without thinking, and am more than ready to make a point of forgetting all and everything which might possibly either injure or

annoy Conrad. Fellows who are born, like him, with silver spoons in their mouths, must, of course, be treated with every consideration. I quite agree with you, though, that matrimony has had a wonderfully beautifying effect on Laura. Complexion, eyes, expression! I won't call the change miraculous, because the days of miracles are past, but——"

"I was sure you would think so! I was one of those, you may remember, who never could see much to admire in Miss Ripley. I always said that it was as difficult to get over colourless eyelashes as——"

"A nose without a bridge. Not my own, my dear mother. I never said a clever, or, for the matter of that, *did* a wise thing in my life, and I am past the age—which apparently one of the family is *not*—for transformations."

The tone of his voice, and a certain suggestive emphasis on the polysyllable, aroused, as the speaker probably hoped would be the case, Mrs. Temple's curiosity. She was one of those unimaginative and often-times inconvenient

women who (metaphorically speaking) "when in doubt play trumps." The bottling up of her best cards was a mistake which could rarely, if ever, be laid to Mrs. Temple's door ; a natural frankness of disposition, added to a not *unnatural* desire to *know the worst at once*, causing her to prefer, as a rule, the game which is played, as the saying is, *cartes sur table*.

They were sitting close to an open window, for—late September though it was—the evening was sultry ; and Mrs. Temple had retreated to that quiet spot, in order that, under cover of Laura's pleasant ballet-singing, *she* might put the home questions to Guy which the simple woman felt so certain would be answered in the affirmative. As I have already said, her son's last words did not fall to the ground unheeded. To imagine double meanings, or even to suspect that in single ones more was meant than met the ear, was very far from being in Gertrude Temple's line ; but whether it was that an already jarring chord had been struck, or that to a train of thought (hidden hitherto, and unsuspect-




ed) a match had been suddenly—by Guy's unexpected remark—applied, matters little. Suffice it that she was roused to say, in a voice rather more shrilly pitched than usual, and which rather startled Guy:

“Why, good gracious! You don't mean to say that you think she paints?”

“*Paints!*” repeated Guy, in a whisper which was in itself a warning. “My dear mother, when you do use an indiscreet word, you really ought to be cautious! And the idea of your being surprised! why, it is so evident! So palpable! White eyelashes don't grow black of themselves, and if Con's wife *is* indebted to the magic touch of art for the advantage of being quite a pretty, instead of plain young woman, I do not see that any one, excepting, perhaps, Con himself, has the slightest right to complain.”

“Thanks!” said a laughing voice near them—Conrad's voice, to wit—a fact which was further evidenced, had such evidence been wanting, by the whiff from a cigar which just then struck upon the unaccustomed nostrils (for smoking



was a pleasure enjoyed under difficulties at Temple Court), of the gentle mistress of the house. "Thanks, Guy, for your compliment to Lolo. Impossible to have put the thing more neatly! I always saw the makings of a pretty woman in Laura, and between us——"

"But, my dear Conrad," began Mrs. Temple, "surely you do not approve—you do not think it advisable——"

"I think it advisable that everyone, whether man or woman, old or young, should endeavour to make the best of themselves. There is nothing I dislike more than a woman letting herself run to seed——"

"But, my dear, there is a medium—Laura need not have neglected herself——"

"Trust me for not letting her do that! Lolo was just the kind of girl, till I was down upon her, to have become, after her marriage, a regular dowdy—tossing on her clothes with a pitchfork, and that kind of thing. It took me some time and trouble to break her in, I can tell you that, so I am rather proud of my success. Laura had

the same kind of idea, mother, that you seem to have, namely, that it is more wickedly deceiving to darken one's eye-lashes than to whiten one's teeth; and, upon my soul, her personal artifices have never gone further. She will tell you so herself;" and putting his curly brown head in at the window, he called aloud to his wife to come to him.

Mrs. Temple was on thorns. Being naturally a shy woman, she was even yet, after three days of nearly constant companionship, far from feeling *quite* at home with her pleasant, cheery daughter-in-law. As the latter, at the sound of her husband's voice, came flying, "with the wind from her sails"—*id est*, from her full, flowing muslin skirts—nearly sending the cheap newspaper in Mr. Temple's hand fluttering from his hold, Gertrude whispered imploringly to Conrad her entreaty that he would not speak to Lolo as he had threatened to do.

"*Pray* don't; she will think it so strange—such a liberty!"

But Conrad, instead of obeying, said, with affected gravity,

"I want her to tell you how I managed to tackle her. I say, Lolo, do you remember Sophie Bellenger?"

"That horrid girl, with the black eye-lashes?" laughed Lolo—"of course I do. Mrs. Temple, you never saw such eye-lashes, and such powdered cheeks, and scarlet-dyed lips, like a clown in a pantomime! And Conrad fell in love with her—he did, indeed, he will tell you so himself."

"No, he will not. You should never make too sure of anything. I fell in love with nothing about sweet Sophie but her eye-lashes; and when Lolo found that out, mother, she came round in such double-quick time that I was positively ashamed of her—was for rushing into all sorts of extremes. If I had allowed her to go on, my dear mother, you would have been shocked. Sophie's scarlet lips would have been a joke to hers, and——"

"Oh, Conrad, how can you? Don't believe

him, Mrs. Temple," Lolo was beginning, when the harsh voice of the head of the family arrested the words on her lips.

"What *are* you all doing at the open window?" the ungenial voice said, "giving one one's death of cold? Shut it, will you, Mrs. Temple? *You* may fancy it the middle of Summer, but for anyone who is not so strong as a horse, that kind of thing is a bore."

At once—so terribly easy is it often, for the one individual having authority, to throw the wet blanket of gloom over the crushed shoulders of a household—the merriment of the small group at the offending window was checked, and their laughter turned to heaviness. The dictatorial order to shut out the sweet external air was at once obeyed, but not before Laura—for the window was a French one, and opened from the ground—had flitted through it to the moonlit gravelled walk outside.

Conrad strode on moodily, with the pipe of reflection between his lips, whilst his wife, bare-headed, and with her gay spirits for the mo-

ment quelled, "kept step" in silence by his side.

"I say," were the first words, spoken carelessly—for, after the fashion of so many of his sex, he was averse to *showing* attention to his wife—"I say, won't you catch cold with nothing on your shoulders?"

"Oh no, I don't mind; I'm not going to stay. Besides," laughing softly, "I am fortunately one of those strong people who don't object to night-air. Now, Con," after a pause, "I am not going to let you look black over what your father said."

"Black! What nonsense! As if I wasn't well used to that kind of thing! I warned you, Lolo, of what you had to expect when you came to Temple Court, so *you*—new as this kind of thing must be to you—have no reason to be surprised."

"And I'm not—*really* I am not; I——"

"Oh yes, I quite understand; you think it the most natural, the most every-day thing in life, that a man, calling himself a gentleman—that's

the fun of it, I suppose, only one can't exactly see it in that light—should break out before a stranger, and——”

“Meaning me? But, Con, dear, I don't consider myself a stranger—at least, not exactly—at Temple Court.”

“By Jove! seeing the way my father conducts himself in what is called ‘the bosom of his family,’ I should say that to be ranked as the ‘stranger within his gates’ should be thought rather a privilege than otherwise.”

And Conrad, who, notwithstanding his assertion to the contrary, had been bitterly angry at the rudeness, as he justly considered it, to which Laura, by becoming his wife, had subjected herself, relapsed into silence, puffing away more fiercely than ever at the now nearly exhausted *dudeen*.

Laura, too, was for a minute or two lost in analysing thought. At last she said,

“I suspect that it is very much a case of habit. Your father has evidently got into a way of saying everything that comes upper-

most, and it would be difficult to make him see that——”

“A man who is rude, and selfish, and contradictory, and overbearing in the privacy of his own family, being only deterred from the like conduct in public by *fear*, is——”

“No, no. You are putting words into my mouth which I never intended to use. What I was going to say is this, that perhaps I, being a new element in the family, might, by force of habit—for I am not vain enough to suppose that I could influence him in a moment——”

She was stopped by Conrad, who, taking her suddenly by the shoulder, and shaking it with an anger that was only half-simulated, said,

“By Jove! an excellent idea! My wife devoting herself to the improvement of my father’s temper and manners! I like that, Laura! I like it so much that, by G—! if you ever come to stay at Temple Court again, I’ll——”

“You’ll what, you foolish boy?” And then she, in her pleasant, persuasive way, continued,



"I have not been your wife eight months without being quite certain that you would be wretched *afterwards*, if, during his lifetime, you had behaved otherwise than well to your father. You say yourself that he is altered—broken. What excuses may there not often be, excuses of which we know nothing, for the small crossnesses which often make healthy, happy people so resentful and contemptuous. I am preaching, dear, very saucily, but you will forgive me. Unavailing remorse always seems to me so very hard a thing to bear."

They were close, by this time, to the open glazed door of the conservatory that opened into the drawing-room, and Conrad's only reply to his wife's exordium was bidding her "cut along in, out of the cold."

That her words had not, however, fallen upon utterly barren rock, may be gathered from the fact that he abstained from imparting to his wife the melancholy truth that the necessity for finding excuses for his father's temper was of no

recent date. For thirty years Mrs. Temple had failed to find them, though the patient woman had "sought for them carefully, and with tears."

## CHAPTER VII.

IT was considered to be, on almost every account, fortunate that Mrs. Conrad Temple had not, before her matrimonial engagement, completed the purchase of a place in West-hamptonshire, to be the possessor of which she had, at one time, set her heart. The money set apart for that purpose, and which amounted to twenty thousand pounds, would have been of itself wholly insufficient to clear Temple Court of its incumbrances; but seeing that the newly-married pair were not thwarted in their wishes by those vexatious results of civilization, yclept trustees and marriage settlements, it followed that they were enabled, by a further advance

of thirty thousand pounds, to set one of the most beautiful of England's ancestral homes on (to borrow a homely expression) its legs again.

Richard Temple's delight in this appropriation of the heiress's superfluous thousands knew no bounds. Nor was that delight in the slightest degree lessened by the reflection that, by that appropriation, he laid himself under a heavier obligation to his son's wife than he (Richard Temple, of Temple Court) was likely ever to be able to discharge. By the higher-minded of his own family—by Mrs. Temple and Reginald, that is—this obtuseness on the part of the family autocrat was a source of much regret and vexation. They could not understand, and were constantly exposed to the deepest mortification at sight of the cool, take-it-as-a-matter-of-course manner which Richard Temple, as regarded the immense pecuniary favours bestowed upon him by his daughter-in-law, had adopted.

"Your father seems to think," Mrs. Temple was goaded to say one day to Reginald, "that it is *we* who are conferring a favour on Laura,

by gradually permitting her to be one of us. Temple is an old, and hitherto, thank God! an unstained name," she, without noticing (happily for her peace of mind) the look of extreme pain which flitted over Regy's face, continued, "but how long, as matters were going with us, it would have been likely to remain so, Heaven only knows! However," with a sigh which was far more full of sadness than of joy, "there can be no doubt that the comfort of freedom from daily, hourly care and anxiety is very great, and for *that* we must be thankful, even though the means by which it has been obtained is not precisely such as *I* should have chosen. Ah! how well I remember," she went on musingly, her needle-work hanging loosely from her lap, whilst Regy, leaning back in an arm-chair near her, was, with the deft fingers peculiar to the "blind," knitting some Winter garments for an old cottager, who would, you may be sure, prize the comfortable gift none the less because the thin white hands of the "poor young gentleman" at the Court had fashioned it—"How well

I remember," Mrs. Temple said, "the first time your father ever spoke to me about Conrad's endeavouring to gain Laura Ripley for his wife. 'Everything depends,' he said, 'on Con's being First in the Field.' Now, though I daresay that Conrad owed something to *that*, yet——"

"Mother, dear," Regy said warmly, "I do believe that if there were twenty before him, Con would have had a chance. Any woman, let her have been ever so rich, or well-born, or beautiful, might have felt proud, though he was so poor, to be chosen by him."

"I only hope he'll make her happy," sighed Mrs. Temple, who was wont to take rather a desponding view of a woman's chances of drawing, in the lottery of matrimonial life, a "prize."

"It will be more than half Laura's fault if he doesn't," Regy said stoutly, "for Con is a gentleman, and I am afraid, mother, that, as the world goes, *that* is a woman's best security against the ill-behaviour towards her of her husband. Dear old Con!" he added, ceasing a moment from his work, and looking up with his poor blank eyes,

full of feeling, at least so thought his mother, who used always to declare that Regy *saw with his soul*, into *her* loving face. "Dear old man! How well and jollily he spoke that day! There never was anyone more thoroughly above meanness and deceit, and plotting and planning, than Con; and when he thanked us all for drinking his and the bride's health, one felt that what he did say—it wasn't much certainly, but every word was to the purpose—came direct from his heart, and was thoroughly to be depended upon——"

"Conrad never did himself justice. He was always amongst the few who endeavour to make themselves appear worse rather than better than they are."

"The effort did not give him much trouble, dear mother, I suspect. Con has cared too little, I fear, for the opinion of the world, to exert himself one way or the other. But if it be true, what some one once said (a French *one*, I think), that men are loved for the qualities which they *have*, and not for those which they *appear* to

possess, Con runs a good chance, I think, of being properly appreciated by his wife."

"God grant it!" sighed poor Mrs. Temple, who had been too long Richard Temple's wife, for the domestic duty of "making the best of things" to be, in her case, easy of accomplishment. "I should feel more sanguine," she added, "if Guy, instead of Conrad, were Laura's husband. There is so much more that is solid and reliable in Guy's character. I do not say that he is so pleasant," she—in answer to an involuntary exclamation, which sounded like dissent, from Reginald—gently parenthesised. "Dear Con, is not naturally of so reticent a disposition as Guy; but then the atmosphere of that dismal house, and living so much with poor Selina, could hardly fail, you know, to make him steadier and quieter than other young men of his age. It is a great thing for young people to be obliged to curb their tongues, and to put a restraint upon their tempers. Habit is so all-important. Yes, I feel almost certain that Laura would have had a better chance with



Guy. It is always a terrible risk, marrying for money," Mrs. Temple added, with a sigh ; " but we must hope for the best, and hitherto, it must be owned, the poor thing's money has brought us nothing but good."

Regy was not in a mood for talking, or he might have averred, and that not by any means for the first time, that, to the best of his opinion, Conrad had not committed the sin—a very venial one—in the world's opinion, of marrying without love. Con had been, on the subject of his feelings towards Laura, very open with his blind brother. Regy was such an admirable recipient of such confidences—so necessarily neutral—so thoroughly to be trusted! Whether, however, if he had possessed any secret of the nature of which he had any reason to be ashamed, he would have entrusted that secret to high-principled, pure-minded Regy, is, I should be inclined to think, more than doubtful.

It was so new a thing to listen to praises of Guy from his mother's lips, that—although on more accounts than one it troubled Reginald

that those praises should have been bestowed at the expense, as it were, of Conrad—he was in no ways moved thereby to utter a word in disparagement of Miss Bainbridge's *protégée* and “thrall.”

There were, as Regy too truly feared, troublous times in store for Guy, and seeing that *he* was powerless to avert the storm, the blind man shrank with nervous dread from uttering a word which might possibly, seeing that “dire events from little causes spring,” hasten the catastrophe which every day brought, in Regy's opinion (but then, as Guy often said, what did *he* know of the world?), nearer, and more near.

## CHAPTER VIII.

“SO you really must leave us to-morrow? Not two whole days! There never was anything so shabby! Surely, on such an occasion—a bride’s visit; your own sister-in-law—and Conrad having been away so long, might be for once urged as a reason for——”

“For playing truant, eh, Guy?” laughed Conrad; at which home-thrust, the individual aimed at—who was standing on the hearthrug, leaning his broad shoulders against the mantel-shelf—winced visibly.

It was immediately after breakfast—too soon for the dispersion which, in most well-regulated families, usually follows on that meal—and in

Mrs. Temple's pleasant-room (into which, as it possessed the advantages of looking south-east, the bright September sun was staring boldly), the small domestic party had, with the exception of the master of the house, gathered themselves for a brief space together.

Restless Conrad, wandering, with his hands in his pockets, from window to window, was laying plans for his day's shooting; whilst Lolo, who had undertaken the task of "tidying" her mother-in-law's "wools," waited patiently, in the hope that Con would say something about riding with her. A "something," by the way, which, as long as there was anything like shooting to be had, the poor young woman stood but little chance of listening to.

As for Regy, who was far more at home in that small sunny chamber than the rest, *he* had already drawn out his knitting from its accustomed abiding-place, and was feeling his heart—the poor weak heart of which the doctors always spoke so warningly—beating faster (perhaps because of the near neighbourhood to

his chair of his big brother Guy) than was its wont.

"Well, but, *seriously*, my dear," said Mrs. Temple, who being herself totally ungiven to joking, was curiously apt, in her capacity of peace-maker, to resort to this thoroughly inappropriate exordium—" *seriously*, dear Guy, could you not give us another day? There is the telegraph, you know, and you have been here so little lately! Why, this time last year——"

"Ah! but you forget. There was an attraction *then* in the neighbourhood. Miss Lizzie Fairholme—the Lily of the Lees, didn't they call her?—was quite pretty enough to——"

"What humbugging nonsense you are talking!" burst in Guy, furiously. "Can't you leave the girl's name alone?" he added, a shade less passionately, for, startled into the committal of a terrible blunder though he had been, he yet retained sufficient presence of mind to be aware not only of his mistake, but of the desirableness of doing away, if possible, with the impression

which his sudden violence might have created. "I never," he said, after a short pause, during which everybody present both looked and felt uncomfortable, "could see the wit of chaffing a fellow about some woman for whom he probably cares no more than he does for his mother's housemaid. Such confounded rot!"

Poor Mrs. Temple, whose life was spent in a chronic state of alarm lest the grievous words which, even when they fail to "stir up anger," are too often the cause of heart pain unutterable, should be given voice to in her hearing, was preparing her vial (kept always at hand for domestic use, and inexhaustible as the widow's cruze), in order to pour oil upon the waters of strife, when Conrad, who would much have preferred giving, in brotherly fashion, Master Guy a "piece of his mind," was moved instead, and that chiefly from consideration for the presence of his wife and mother, to put a bridle on his tongue.

"All right," he said, "old fellow. Least said, soonest mended; and, as you say, one has no

right to make free with young ladies' names. I say, Lolo, about that note to Sir Miles, if you'll write it now, I'll give it to James, who has asked leave to go and see his mother at the Lodge."

"You can write here, my dear, at that table," Mrs. Temple said; and Laura, with a bright "Thank you, mother," sat down to her task at once.

Meanwhile Guy, looking, even as he felt, extremely foolish, after lounging, with an affectation of carelessness towards a window whence he could see nothing more interesting than a couple of peacocks sunning themselves on the broad terrace outside, suddenly turned on his heel, and left the room.

Conrad was silent for a few minutes after the door had closed, and then, with a genuinely puzzled face, said,

"What an odd fellow Guy is! The idea, now, of his taking me *au sérieux*. If he wasn't as steady as old Time, and as cold-blooded as a codfish, one would almost suspect that there

might possibly have been something in it——”

“But even if there were,” Mrs. Temple said eagerly—“and Guy certainly did, like everyone else, admire Miss Fairholme—*that* is over long ago, thank God! It has been a blow, and a heavy one, I fear, to old Mr. Beamish, that Lizzie could not make herself contented at the Lees; but, on the whole, I daresay it is for the best, and he seems tolerably reconciled now to her loss.”

“Does the old fellow talk about her now?” Conrad asked. “It used to be such a sore subject, that I’ve been putting off going to see him, from a feeling that I didn’t know whether to speak to him about his niece or not.”


“Oh! by all means inquire after her. And, Con, go to the Lees as soon as you can find time, to please me,” she, laying her hand on her son’s arm, added. “John Beamish is such an old friend, and so interested in the family; besides, he will like to show you Lizzie’s letters—from abroad, most of them. She is travelling with a family of the name of Clayton, as gover-



ness, of course, and got the situation by having her name put down at some institution or other in London. Mr. Beamish says that when Lizzie comes back to England, if it's ever so far, he'll go, please God, and see her ; but as for trusting himself on salt water, he's many a day too old, he said, for such foolishness."

"And the Australian—that big, good-natured fellow," said Conrad, who, apparently in the mood for questioning, had taken up his place beside his mother on the sofa, and was rapidly, with unconsciously mischievous fingers, undoing the setting-in-order work which his wife had so deftly commenced. "What became of George Beamish? Went back to the diggings, I suppose, a wiser and better man?"

"I don't know about his being wiser," said, in a low voice (one which, since the conversation turned upon Lizzie Fairholme, had been entirely mute), the voice of blind Reginald, who had never yet, although many months had sped by since Lizzie had left the neighbourhood, been able to hear, without painful beating of the



heart, even casual mention made of the Lily of the Lees—"I don't know whether George Beamish is a wiser man or not," he said, gently; "but a *better*, never, I believe, existed. I talk of when he was *here*. God knows how he may have deteriorated since. Misfortune and disappointment do not always improve either a man's manners or his temper; but he was so unselfish, so open-handed, so gentle in manner, and yet so full of energy and courage! I have always thought that poor John Beamish felt *that* disappointment more heavily even than he did his other sorrow."

"Poor old fellow! Yes," Conrad said, "he had set his heart on George giving up Australia, and settling at home, with pretty Lizzie as his wife. He talked so much about it too, I recollect, to every one whom he could get to listen to him, so that his pride, as well as his feelings, must have been hurt. Talking is a great mistake—don't you think so, Lolo? For my part I have quite made up my mind that silence is the greatest proof of wisdom. Who

was it that said that, Regy?—you always remember those things—that women never repent of saying too little, while——”

“Now, Mrs. Temple, isn’t he much too bad?” broke in Laura, with a radiant smile, as she came forward, her sealed and directed note in her hand, towards her husband. “He is always talking *at* me in this rude way, for what he calls chattering, and it’s so dreadfully cowardly, for he doesn’t dare to tell me openly that he thinks me a goose.”

“The better part of courage is discretion—eh, young woman?” retorted Conrad, as he rose from his lounging position, and stretched himself, after a fashion which, to Lolo’s accustomed eyes, clearly betokened the fact that he was rather more than ready for his after-breakfast pipe. “I say, Regy, old fellow, come out and have a stroll. We shall find Guy about somewhere, I daresay. By Jove! wasn’t it odd,” he said, in a half whisper—the kind of whisper which, albeit no mortal listeners are near us, we are apt, when a subject is at once both sug-


gestive and perilous—to employ our words in. —“Wasn’t it odd, Guy’s cutting up so rough about Lizzie Fairholme? He must have been awfully spoony, don’t you think so? And yet—who would have dreamt it?—I should as soon have thought of looking for fire in a—a potatoe,” added Conrad, who seemed—symbolical talk not being much in his line—a little at a loss for a comparison, “as in Guy. *You* never thought there was anything in it, did you, Guy?”

A faint smile—one of the saddest that ever failed to light up a human face, was summoned by sheer force of will to Reginald’s lip, as he said, in a voice which, notwithstanding all his efforts, was tremulous and unsteady.

“That certainly is the vaguest question, as I suppose most questions are, in which more is meant than meets the ear; but as I, not being a looker-on, must naturally see very little of the games that are played around me, I cannot, unfortunately, throw any light upon the subject. But, Con,” suddenly changing his tone, for in truth he was terribly anxious—the “home

questions of familiar brotherhood" being awkward things to deal with—that the subject of Gny's *possible* love-affair should be no longer dwelt upon—"but, Con, look here, you were talking of going to London for a fortnight or so, were you not?"

"Yes; you see, Lolo has set her heart upon renting that charming little place I told you of in Sussex, and I must see the agent, and all that kind of thing, about the arrangements. It is astonishing the fancy that Lo has taken to Ashbridge; and I think I shall like it too. There won't be very bad hunting, and, though it's small, it's wonderfully pretty. I shall like, of all things, to show it to you," he rattled on, utterly oblivious for the moment of his brother's misfortune, "that is, if we take it. What I should like most, though, would be—but," taking the pipe from his mouth, and speaking in the slow way that is usual with men who, not being much in the habit of originating ideas, are fully impressed, when such an event *does* take place, with the great importance of the event, "you



won't say a word about this—not even to my mother? There would be the devil and all to pay, you know, if you did.”

Regy, whose mind was, as the saying is, “elsewhere,” gave, without any pause for reflection, the required promise. Conrad was one of the last men in the world likely to possess any secrets which it would be either culpable, or dangerous to keep, so the words, for which Con had so short a time to wait, were said, and the elder brother having apparently forgotten, for the nonce, his lately-quoted axiom that “silence is wisdom,” went on with his confessions.

“You see, Regy,” (the blind man caught himself sometimes smiling sadly at the frequency of this exordium, as addressed by his brothers to his blind self)—“that if there is a thing on earth which ‘riles’ me, it is the owing everything—every farthing I possess or spend—to Laura. She’s the least bumptious woman I know. Not a soul, I am sure, except those who are aware of the fact, would ever

take her to be an heiress, and yet—Well, there is no use trying to explain the feeling, I only know that I positively *long*, in a way that I wouldn't for the world that Lolo should suspect, for a certain amount of independence, a certain sense—do you see what I mean ? I am such a bad hand at explaining myself—of not being quite a pauper ; dependent for the bread I eat, the coat I wear, the horse I ride, and the roof which covers me, on my wife !”

There was just the faintest tinge of sarcasm, no more, in Reginald's tone, as he said :

“ You have made out a hard case, certainly. So many crumpled rose-leaves must perforce produce a raw ; but,” correcting himself hastily for this temporary indulgence in a sin (that of a tendency to sarcasm) which, prior to the time when life-long darkness fell upon him, had been a besetting one of Regy's, and he was strongly imbued with the advisableness of “ keeping.”—to borrow the Psalmist's words—“ the door of his lips ”—“ but you must not expect *me* to sympathize very deeply with you in your hatred

of what you call 'dependence.' Why, if I felt anything approaching to it, my life would be a positive burden to me. You will say, of course, that the cases are not synonymous," he continued, arresting, as he did so, the protesting words which had risen to Con's ready tongue; "and I oughtn't, perhaps, to have been so prompt to make an example of myself; but when one wants to illustrate a theory, one naturally takes the first case in point that comes to hand. And my theory is—not a new one, you will say—but then new theories are about as rare in these days as a blossoming aloe—that it is not possible for any human being that exists to lay the flattering unction to his or her soul, that the *stain*, as you seem to consider it, of *dependence* does not rest there. Why, to begin at home, take, if you will, your own wife's case. What, I ask you, would become of Lolo now without your love, your sympathy, and your protection? And then——"

"Ah! that is all deuced fine, Regy," interrupted Conrad impatiently, "and true, too, I



daresay, after a fashion; but a man's feelings, don't you see, *are* his feelings, and because Laura may be fond of me—which I believe she really is, poor girl!—that is no reason **why** I ~~should not feel like a flunkey~~ in living, as I do, *entirely* on her money. Gad! the lots of dirt I feel to eat! And then there are all those thousands spent in freeing Temple Court, *our* place and property, from debts and mortgages! How often I wish that I had *insisted* on having her fortune settled on herself! But Lolo was so obstinate, so determined to have her own way! And there was that fellow Davison, too, I never could understand *his* motive for being so entirely on Laura's side of the question. He had no power, of course—was not guardian, or trustee, or anything of that sort, but still—However, there is no use talking over what is too late now to mend, and that being the case, I am about to make a grand *coup* (I have no doubt that *you* will think me perfectly inexcusable when you hear what it is), in the hope of turning an honest penny for myself."

Reginald laughed slightly.

"If the penny be, as you say, and as I am sure it will be, an '~~honest~~' one,' there is no fear of my being down upon you for '~~turning~~' it," he said; and, as he spoke, the thin hand which ~~rested~~ on Conrad's strong right arm, pressed ~~that~~ stalwart prop in sign of ~~affectionate~~ confidence in his brother's rectitude of purpose.

"But, Regy," proceeded Colonel Temple, with some slight confusion manifested in the handsome face which could be no tell-tale to the trusting heart, "you will call what I am about to do, or rather," correcting himself hastily, "what I *have done*, '~~gambling~~,' and that of the worst kind, perhaps; and yet, so much depends on people's habits of thought," continued Conrad, unconscious that he was giving voice to a rather deeper reflection than was his wont, "that you *may*, my dear Redge, consider that I am making more fuss about this confession of mine than is either necessary or called for. The truth is," drawing rather a long breath, "I am in for a stock-jobbing affair. You

know—at least, you have heard me talk of old Henshaw, poor Lady Grafton's relation, whom I have met so often at Holly Combe?"

"I know—I remember," murmured Reginald, who had a faint recollection of having once, years before, and when *he* was a light-hearted lad, enjoying, with all the zest and eagerness of eighteen, the out-of-door pleasures suited to his age, been struck by the extreme silence and stiffness of a tall elderly gentleman, with a red face and grey head, whose nickname of Poker Henshaw had seemed, at that time, very happily bestowed. "I quite remember the man now," he repeated, "and how we laughed because he talked of trout 'biting' instead of *rising*! So Mr. Henshaw is a stock-jobber, and a gentleman, eh, Con?"

"Well, yes, after a fashion, and he has been wonderfully good-natured to me. Offered, whenever he saw an opening for a good thing, to put me up to it, and that's just what he *has* done. Henshaw pledges himself to my clearing twenty thousand pounds."

“But at what risk? And at whose? Con, you never were more right! It is not for me—I feel *that*—to preach prudence and well-doing to you, but you made a good guess when you said that I should call this thing you talk of *gambling*, and ‘miserable’ gambling, too; for whose money, excepting Laura’s, have you to risk? And you talk of independence, and the shame of owing all to her! In your case, I feel that I would rather do anything with my wife’s money than risk it in reckless speculations.”

“Well, there are still worse ways than that,” said Conrad, “of proving oneself to be low-minded as well as unprincipled. For instance, look at young Welford—rescued from worse than penury by the fortune of his pretty young wife. He can find nothing better to do with the odd hundreds he has at his disposal than to lavish them on grasping, reckless, disreputable women, who, while they laugh at the foolish fellow behind his back, are leading him at the rate of an express train to ruin. *That*, however, is neither here nor there, and you are thorough-

ly right, Regy, in what you say about gambling with one's wife's money. Henshaw tells me there is no risk, not a shadow of it; and I believe it, for a more cautious, crafty old fellow does not exist, and he is rolling in wealth—absolutely *rolling*; and with no one, ostensibly, (but those middle-aged city men are not to be trusted further than you can see them), to inherit it.”

“And if you are so fortunate, as you will call it, as to gain this money, I can see what the miserable consequences will be: you will be tempted to go on till you grow sordid and heartless, with but one idea, that of watching with feverish eagerness for the changes and chances which may bring you the only thing on earth that will have any longer the power to interest you. Oh! Con, do be advised by me, and stop in time, before the horrible thirst for gold seizes on you, like a maddening fever, which you will never be able to shake off.”

“Nonsense! You are putting it a great deal too strongly,” said Conrad, whose provocation

with himself for his folly in making a confidant of his behind-the-world brother, lent unwittingly a sound of irritation to his voice. "Why do you decide so conclusively that I *must* be such a weak, unprincipled fool? It is not complimentary, Redge, to say the least of it."

"Perhaps not; I don't know," rejoined Reginald, as he removed from the aching forehead, on which drops of perspiration stood like beads, the light straw hat he wore. I didn't mean to make myself particularly disagreeable, Con," he added, with a faint smile; "'different habits of thought,' you know,"—quoting his brother's words—"may have something to do with what you call my strong way of putting a matter which people who know the world would probably see in quite a different light. And, Con, old man, as to my thinking you weak and foolish—you *quite* mistake me there. But temptation is so terribly powerful!—the best, the most honourable are not proof against it; and then comes ruin—absolute and shameful ruin to body and soul! Oh, Con—my dear brother,

won't you listen to me?—won't you let well alone? All is happy and prosperous with you now. No fear that the world's tongues will be busy with your name, and their talk"—with a strong shiver, which, together with his excited manner, a little alarmed Conrad—"is so cruel, so dreadful!"

"Regy! are you ill, lad? What's the matter?" asked Colonel Temple, hurriedly. But the question remained, in words at least, unanswered; for the next moment the slight form was hanging, a dead weight, on his brother's arm. Reginald Temple had fainted!

## CHAPTER IX.

“**A**ND you are sure, *quite* sure, that there is nothing new—nothing worse or more alarming than usual the matter? Dr. Price, I would rather—far rather know the truth—I can bear to hear it, I can indeed. It is uncertainty which kills, and the dread of I know not what that makes me seem so very weak and helpless.

Gertrude Temple, when she addressed this entreaty to the old family doctor who had attended her boy in so many of his childish illnesses, and well knew how frail was the tenure which Regy held on life, believed firmly in the truth of her own assertion, that she was armed with courage to learn “the worst.” But—hap-



pily for her present peace of mind—Dr. Price, a man of sense, as well as experience and feeling, judged differently. Well he knew the effect which the sight of great and continuous suffering endured by a doomed-to-death object of affection, has in reconciling the survivors to his loss. The Westhampton medical man knew of a certainty (humanly speaking, of course) that Mrs. Temple's blind son would never see his twenty-third birthday; but he also knew, of at least an equal verity, that when the mother who doted on him, had watched lone hours by his couch of pain, had noted the once bright intellect of her "youngest, dearest one," grow dulled with sleeplessness and suffering, and had seen on his patient face the yearning look—one which even on young features can be sometimes traced—the look that speaks a longing for the rest of death,—I say that Dr. Price's long experience in such cases told him that, although at whatsoever time he might be taken from her, Gertrude Temple would mourn for her son with the "dull, deep pain, the constant anguish of patience,"

yet there would be consolation for her in the thought that never more would the pale lips quiver with the effort to suppress the moans of pain, or the sightless eyes turn longingly to the kindly anxious faces which had been so long a blank to him.

Regy's sudden attack of faintness—an attack which Dr. Price had no hesitation in attributing to “want of tone”—caused great alarm and anxiety at Temple Court. It was now three years at least since any symptom of so serious a kind had occurred, to remind the many who had loved and valued Regy that the life which he—(though for him, it had been deprived of one of its choicest blessings)—still so greatly enjoyed, hung, as it were, upon a thread.

That for many months past he had been looking ill and out of spirits was a fact which every one was now ready to own, that he or she had noticed; but in reality, so little apt are we to mark the gradual changes which take place immediately around us, it was only by his mother's eyes that the wan looks and dispirited manner

of her darling had been perceived and inly mourned over. Reginald had not—Mrs. Temple had noted that—succumbed without an effort to the depression, which, proceeding—as she feared was the case—from some hidden cause, was in such marked contrast to his usually buoyant spirits. He had struggled hard, but totally in vain, to conceal from her that for some reason, which she was powerless to fathom, her once light-hearted boy was miserable!

Regy's love for music amounted almost to a passion. He was gifted, too, with a quick ear, and a voice which, though the reverse of powerful, was very sweet and flexible. To his mother, the sound of it, carolling blithely like—as the poor fellow laughingly expressed it—a “blinded canary,” was music indeed; whilst even morose Richard Temple, who had no soul for melody, and who had often, in sardonic vein, boasted of his singular good fortune, in that, having *only* boys, he was not “bothered with family strumming,” had been heard to say, that it was a comfort to hear Regy sing, since it showed that

the poor boy had found some way of amusing himself.

But comfort of this description had been for Richard Temple long since at an end; and whether or not he noticed that so it was, it would have been hard to say, for the tyrant of Temple Court was, or appeared to be, as little capable of evincing *feeling* as of requiring or needing sympathy. If he *did*, however, love or respect any individual upon earth, that individual was his blind son; so it is just possible that, although he made no allusion to the circumstance, he missed the pleasant sound about the house of that fresh young voice, and of the merry laughter which sprang from as light a heart as ever made—both for the sake of others and his own—the best of inevitable misfortunes.

Once, and once only, had Gertrude Temple ventured to sound her boy on the subject which caused in her own breast such deep anxiety. He had been singing, at her request, the plaintive old ballad, the opening words of which are, "I have a secret sorrow here;" and when

he had finished, and the last wailing note of the extempore symphony had faded on the ear, she said, on the impulse of the moment, and pressing, as she spoke, the thin white hand which had lingered on the keys, tenderly between her own,

“My boy, what is wrong with you? You are so changed from the bright Regy who used to be my joy and comfort; and if you knew, if you could but guess, how I miss and long for *him*, you would at least tell me why he has gone, and left the house so silent and so sad.”

There was no answer; only the fingers returned with interest the pressure of hers, and Gertrude felt that he was shivering nervously. Suddenly—for though the mother of three grown-up sons, Gertrude Temple was more shy and diffident than many a nineteenth-century girl of twenty—the idea—(it seemed strange then that it had never occurred to her before) struck her mind that she had perhaps taken unseemly advantage of her maternal character to intrude upon secrets a share in which she had

no right to expect; whereupon, blushing painfully for her supposed mistake, she said,

“Forgive me, dear, I forgot—I always do—that you are now a man. Twenty-two! How almost impossible it seems! But you will always, absurd as it may sound, be something like a child to me; and if I could lighten for you a single sorrow, or bear my part of any burden that Providence may see fit to lay upon you——”

“Dear mother,” he faltered, “how good you are to me—*so* good and patient; and if I *had* a grief which you could share, if—” he checked himself suddenly, and then said, with the air and tone of one who had all at once come to an important resolution, “Mother, I cannot, I will not deceive you altogether—I *am* unhappy, and my misery is of a kind in which you, dear, can bear no part. If this were not so, I am much too selfish to resist the temptation of opening my heart to you, and of being comforted, as I used to be when I was a child, by your love and sympathy.”

He had his arm round her neck by this time, and his cheek resting against her bosom recalled so forcibly to poor Gertrude the many times when, the sickly, suffering little fellow, who was now a man, with a man's cares and trials, had been rocked to uneasy slumber on her breast, that the tears, which she had hitherto restrained with difficulty, welled slowly from her eyes, and fell silently upon Regy's bent-down head.

"If I could only be a child again!" he murmured; and then, raising his head, with a poor attempt at cheerfulness, from its resting-place, he said, "Mother, all the mischief, as you say, comes of my being twenty-two. It is all a mistake—a frightful blunder. I was not originally intended by nature to pass the age of boyhood. Old Nurse Greenfield was quite right when she made that remark about sixteen years ago. I heard her, as I lay awake staring at the candle-light through an opening in the bed-curtains; and I remember feeling not at all frightened, but only *very* sorry. I looked

upon Nurse Greenfield then as a kind of oracle, and it did not occur to me that she could possibly be mistaken. She looked far too wise, besides, in her big spectacles, for that; and Jenny, who was sitting opposite to her with some flannel-work in her hand, was staring at her with such widely opened eyes and mouth! Yes, I wasn't the least terrified then at the idea of death—poor little weakly shrimp that I was! Do you know, mother, I have an idea that, whatever people have to bear, they are enabled, by a temperament and constitution given them on purpose, *to bear*.”

It was all said dreamily, and in a simple manner, which was utterly destitute of self-consciousness or egotism. The effect on Mrs. Temple of both his words and manner was saddening in the extreme. Answer him at first she could not. Her sense of failure—for Regy had told her nothing more than that of which her fears had made her cognizant before—chilled and disappointed her; and then there were those most melancholy words of his—words



that to her were mournfully suggestive of the

“Calm thoughts which dwelt like hermits in his soul,”

habitual tenants that had seemed, before the coming of the heavy sorrow, the existence of which the poor mother had scarcely attempted to deny—to bring with them content.

This short and very unsatisfactory conversation had occurred about a fortnight prior to the visit of Conrad and his bride—a visit to which Regy had appeared to look forward, now that the time for it to take place drew near, with an eagerness which Mrs. Temple noticed with great but silent satisfaction. She had always, previous to Guy's marriage, entertained a kind of vague and unreasoning idea, one that was certainly scarcely justified by circumstances, that of his two brothers, the one with whom Regy had the most tastes in common, and whose companionship therefore he preferred, was Guy. But during the last swiftly-passing months a change in the relations between her two younger sons had, by Mrs. Temple's watchful eyes, been discovered.

Guy's always short sojourns at the Court had become further separated than ever; and when there, it was evident to Gertrude that the brothers were very far from seeking with solicitude each other's society.

It was more, perhaps, on Regy's side than on Guy's that the desire to avoid *tête-à-tête* fraternal communion was manifest. Mrs. Temple's perspicacity, however, did not extend far enough into the millstone of the mystery to remark this; but she either did see, or fancied she perceived, that Guy's manner, which was usually rather the reverse of conciliating, had become, through an absence of what Conrad was accustomed to call bumptiousness, greatly improved. Guy's ordinary swagger was, as the said Conrad had been wont to remark, probably caused by the obligation under which, in Miss Bainbridge's presence, that unlucky heir-expectant lay to *efface* himself. *La suffisance rentrée* (if we may give Conrad credit for having guessed the truth) did not certainly tend to make Guy Temple an agreeable member of society.

It being, however, far more in air and manner than in words that Guy Temple announced the fact that he stood very well in his own opinion, it is not very surprising that Reginald should have been hardly aware that so it was. Most of those with whom Regy had to do were in the habit (an involuntary compliment to *his* superiority), unconsciously in most cases, of making the best of themselves. Even Richard Temple could put a curb upon his irritable temper, and appear, under the influence of his blind boy's presence, less selfish and less arrogantly domineering than was his wont. And it was, to a certain extent, the same with Conrad. He was far from being either a profligate or a vicious man; nevertheless he, too, when in familiar converse with Regy, would, almost unknown to himself, "set a watch before his mouth," lest he should speak lightly of deeds which, in Con's own opinion, and also in that of his habitual associates, were thought less than nothing in the way of sins.

And thus it happened—chiefly perhaps be-

cause of the greater liking evinced by Guy for reading, for music, and for poetry—that Reginald, when the out-of-door sports which he had once so dearly loved could no longer be enjoyed by him, clung more to the companionship of Guy than to that of the brother whose reading was chiefly confined to sporting newspapers, and novels of a similar stamp; who thought poetry “a bore,” and almost all music, excepting that of a *rollicking* kind, not worth the trouble of going to hear.

There was, however, in spite of this dissimilarity of tastes, such a reliable fund of strong, practical sense in Con, the atmosphere of truth about him was so pure and pleasant, and the confidence in his loyalty which he inspired in Regy’s breast was so entire, that the time when the latter gave to his elder brother by far the larger share of his fraternal trust and affection, could not be far distant. It was thoroughly, too, in Reginald’s nature to appreciate the pleasant, cheery sister who was likely, as all expected, to do so much towards rendering the

old home at Temple Court less sombre and depressing than had been so long its normal state. They had sat next each other at the wedding-breakfast, laughing and talking merrily; for Laura—as she, in the fulness of her joy, remarked to one of her bridesmaids—felt almost indecorously happy, and only the warning of a great sorrow had as yet thrown its faint shadow across Reginald Temple's path.

During the months of absence spent by the newly-married couple almost entirely in foreign travel, Laura was Regy's constant and unwearied correspondent. They were very pleasant letters which she wrote, full of easily-written gossip, interspersed with just so much art talk and word-scenery painting as sufficed to give a leaven of something like solidity to the whole, and convey to the recipient of Mrs. Conrad's letters from abroad, the pleasing reflection that the time employed in reading them was not wholly thrown away.

“How nicely she writes, and how perfectly happy she seems to be! Such a thoroughly

active mind, and so well suited to Con! He never could have got on with an indolent, dawdling wife. What a pleasure her letters are!"

Such were amongst the remarks and comments with which Mrs. Temple, after reading aloud her daughter-in-law's letter to Reginald, was in the habit of winding up her pleasant task. Nor was the duty of amanuensis—one which to many women, and even, I fear, to some mothers, would have been irksome in the extreme—a source of anything save gratification to Gertrude. She could be of use to Regy; and to feel that she was *that*, to give him pleasure, and to save him, as far as lay in her power, from any of the mortifications and annoyances incidental to his great affliction, was alike the business and the happiness of her life.

And so, as I have said, the months rolled on. The Winter's snows, the Spring's buds, the Summer's harvest passed away, and then, before the Autumn winds had shaken one trembling dead leaf from the trees, or the "merry

brown hares" in the Temple Court paddocks had been startled from their ferny forms by the echo of the sportsman's gun, letters arrived from Paris, bearing the welcome intelligence that the Conrad Temples were on their way home, and hoped to find themselves, in a fortnight at farthest, in Westhamptonshire.

Laura's letter was full, as usual, of amusing, life-like descriptions; and, Paris *habitué* as Colonel Temple was somewhat vain of considering himself, it was tolerably clear to those who read the short, unstudied records of Lolo's daily life, that she went everywhere with her husband. And everything in those halcyon days—days which, alas! were far too bright to last—was "fun" to Lolo. From the pretty, overdressed Yankee girls, who sat giggling on the stairs of the Grand Hotel, with their black-bearded, yellow-visaged Italian courier, because, forsooth, they believed him (on his own showing) to be a Prince, to the veteran café frequenter, with his "*Hein! garçon? Le bain de pied!*" when the bustling waiter seemed likely to overlook the

rule of filling saucer as well as cup with the well chicoried *café-noir*, all was food for amusement to Laura Temple.

“So horrid of them,” she wrote, “to call it a *bain de pied* ! Only a Frenchman would have thought of such a name, and I could not conceive what it meant, till Con explained it to me. He knows Paris so well ; and it is such an advantage to an ignoramus like me to have such an improvement upon ‘Murray’ always at one’s elbow.”

Nothing could be clearer than that Laura Temple worshipped her husband ; whilst a proof of that husband’s superiority of nature might be found in the fact that it was as yet the reverse of deteriorated by the homage which his wife so gladly paid to him.

And now they were coming home, this pair, on whose young heads the gifts of fortune had been showered with such a lavish hand, and Mrs. Temple, as I before said (for this chapter is almost entirely retrospective, and calls, on that account, for the lenient judgment of the



reader), looked forward with a feeling that was akin to confidence to good results following for Regy on the travellers' return. *Any* change from the dreary monotony of existence—as Richard Temple had doomed that existence to be—in the old, silent house, could not but be, as she with reason felt, advantageous to Reginald; and when that change—one from which she hoped so much—was to come in the persons of well-loved relatives (relatives who had not—rare exception in that time-honoured home—the fear of Richard Temple before their eyes), and who, with memories and imaginations stored with the fruits of foreign sights and sounds, were certain (with that agreeable conviction of being satisfactorily listened to, which is one of the results of a sense of wealth and independence) to have, as the saying is, plenty to say for themselves.

Punctual to the day and hour named—(for one of Richard Temple's "little peculiarities," as he charitably called them, was a great objection, always very strongly expressed, to being

kept waiting)—the eagerly-expected guests arrived; and the bride, whose wealth had done such good service for that impecunious family, and who had been won solely—as Richard Temple always averred—through the following his advice—the advice, namely, of being “First in the Field,” was warmly welcomed as a daughter to Temple Court. And, even as Gertrude had foreseen, great, as it was at first gladsome, was the transformation which the return of the heir and suite produced within the ancient walls, in which the elements of cheerfulness had so long been lacking. For the first few days the effect of the change upon Regy’s sensitive and excitable nature was decidedly beneficial; and, noting this, a smile, rare visitant to that careworn face, would sometimes flutter over Mrs. Temple’s pallid lips; while even the master of the house, who took an early opportunity of explaining to his daughter-in-law that his dyspeptic symptoms were just then giving him a *little* respite, brightened up temporarily under the influence of

Lolo's sunny smiles and spontaneously cheery talk.

And if this miracle could be wrought in the "*dry tree*," what might not be done in the "*green?*" And can we be surprised that Regy's old self, the energetic, buoyant spirit that was not only so ready to loving, but so quick to find "*loveliness in all things living*," came back for awhile, in the new atmosphere which he breathed, to the blind lad?

But *only* for awhile. We have seen that though the spirit was more than willing, yet the flesh, overweighted by that spirit's cares, was weak indeed. His brother's sudden attack of faintness had scarcely been more surprising to Conrad than had the extraordinary amount of energy—(*worse* than waste thereof, since it had made Regy ill, his brother considered it)—which Reginald had displayed on the subject of that harmless stockbroking affair. Colonel Temple was not only very fond of Regy, but he held his younger brother's opinions and advice in higher respect than he

was himself aware of. It was as much, therefore, through anxiety for Reginald's health, as because he was really desirous of "having it out" with his Mentor on the subject of the great Henshaw speculation, that the bright idea of endeavouring to persuade Dr. Price to recommend a week or two of London for Reginald, occurred to him.

"I thought him looking awfully seedy, poor fellow, when I first saw him—when we came here a week ago, I mean. Of course he made the best of himself—he always does—but anyone, excepting my mother, who *won't* ever see that Regy's health is less flourishing than usual, and my father, who—begging his pardon, and quite between ourselves—never can see that anything is the matter with anyone but himself——"

"I see—I quite understand, Colonel," interrupted the busy medical practitioner, who, seeing that the valetudinarian owner of Temple Court was, on the whole, far from being one of his least profitable patients, felt rather shocked

by Conrad's unfilial remark. "There is, as I told Mrs. Temple only an hour ago, a want of *tone*, an absence of *rebound*, if I may so call it, about Mr. Reginald, which——"

"I don't know what you mean by *rebound*, Doctor. There can't be much *spring*, I should say, ever, in a blind person; and the wonderful thing, to my mind, is that poor Regy ever *was* jolly. He isn't *now*, that's very clear; and what I want you to say is whether you don't think that being in London for a week or so with us would do him good."

"Indeed, I do—the best thing, under the circumstances, possible. Nothing like change of scene—ahem!—of locality, I should rather say. And then the air. Westhamptonshire I look upon to be one of the most healthy counties in England, and nothing can be better than both the soil and water at Temple Court, but——"

"You may have too much of a good thing, eh, doctor?"

"Exactly. I see you will still have your

joke, Colonel. Matrimony and the Continent haven't knocked the fun out of you yet. But I must be off," looking at his watch. "Things are going rayther contrairy—as the old women say—in the village just now. There's Mrs. Dobbs at the post-office, and little Mrs. Askew——"

"Good G—! Bob Askew's wife again! Why, she had twins less than a year ago! Now, there's a fellow, if you like, who must have had the fun taken out of him——"

"By marriage and its consequences! Not a doubt of it. You never saw a man more changed and broken down. And yet, five years ago, when he took possession of the curacy, you'd think he was the kind of man who'd never say die. One of your regular jolly dogs—so proud of his little wife and his white-headed baby. And now——" And Dr. Price shrugged his shoulders, as though he would say that it was all very well to be proud of *one* baby, but when it came to *five*, and with an income so

limited, that even the question of pap or no pap was one of importance—the less said about family pride the better.

## CHAPTER X.

IT turned out—much to the satisfaction of both Conrad and his wife—that Regy, so far from making any objection to the London plan, confessed that nothing but his fear of being a burden to them had prevented his proposing it himself.

“It will be rather hard upon you and Lolo,” he said; “but my mother, poor thing, would make you think (you see, I am such a constant burden on *her* mind) that I must perforce be troublesome. Now I really and truly shall not be so. Mason would be very indignant if you were to doubt his capacity of piloting me across the most crowded thoroughfare in London. *He* is just a little deaf, but *I* hear quickly enough for



two; so between us, though he is over sixty, poor old fellow, we get along like a house on fire."

"And when do you expect Marsden back again? It was so very unlucky his having to go all the way to Australia."

"Very; and he is doubtful himself now whether any advantage whatever is likely to be gained by his having done so. Marsden would have gone twice the distance for even the chance of making his sister's mind easier; and she is just one of those women who, because sacrifices are made cheerfully, fail utterly to see that they *are* sacrifices, and so accept them quite as a matter of course. As for Jack, I verily believe that *he* is as much, if not more, egged on to this expedition by the sense that he is doing penance than by any other motive."

"Penance for what? I certainly should not have suspected our friend Jack of having committed any secret sins that are unwhipt of justice; but one lives and learns."

"True for you, and Jack has learned to feel

that, having once taken upon himself parsonic vows, it behoves him from time to time to make himself uncomfortable. And I am not at all sure he is not right, though I was so thoroughly riled at first by his going off in that harum-scarum way, and on an errand, too, which was, I felt, so little likely to be successful, that I took at first a quite one-sided view of the matter. There is nothing, for perverting one's moral vision, so efficacious as selfishness. Marsden's long absence from England is a grief and trouble to *me*, so forthwith I am down upon this poor woman, because, forsooth, she catches at Jack's offer."

"And insanely hopes that he will bring back to her from Sydney some proof that her scamp of a son was more sinned against than sinning."

"Exactly; and Marsden is just the man to leave no stone unturned, in the hope of furthering her wishes. Whether they are wise in re-awakening the echoes which, two years ago, were so busy with Julian Forrester's name, is another affair altogether."

"I think they are anything but wise," exclaimed Conrad, whose opportunities of judging whether or not the rehabilitation in the world's opinion of the young gentleman in question had been far more frequent than those of his stay-at-home brother. "The more that kind of thing is stirred—you know the proverb; and it is wonderful, considering how delighted society is with a tit-bit of gossip and naughtiness, how soon—almost before the flesh is off the bone—they abandon it for another, which promises to be a trifle more racy, and according to their taste."

"Quite true—a nine days' gnawing—savage and voracious enough while it lasts, and one which might cause a person to wish (as George Elliot makes Luke, the miller's man, say) 'that it 'ud gripe 'em.'"

Regy, after this quotation from one of his favourite authors, sank into a reverie, from which he was aroused by Conrad saying incidentally—

"What a shocking business this is of poor

Askew's! One isn't surprised, of course, and people who bring their misfortunes upon themselves——"

"Oughtn't to hope for pity; but, Con, what *has* happened at Cherry Cottage? Dr. Price did not mention any of them this morning, and——"

"Oh! it's nothing new, unfortunately. A man, from utterly brutal selfishness—for I maintain it is nothing else—marries a girl without a shilling, gives up a good fellowship, has a family of twins, and, because the unlucky mother thereof was a governess, or something of that kind, there is not the slightest chance of poor Bob ever being taken by his well-to-do relations into favour again. Now that's what *I* call a shocking business—eh, Redge? 'Genteel poverty' with a vengeance! And Bob was always such a good fellow, too! His brother—you know he was in my battalion—told me the other day, when I met him in Paris, that Sir Clifford has never given Bob a farthing since he married, and, moreover, swears by all

that's holy that he never will—a fatal vow, for the old fellow is as obstinate as a pig, and is as proud of sticking to what he has said as most men would be of being made Prime Minister. I don't know that I much like Charley Askew," continued Conrad, after a pause, during which he had apparently been weighing the merits and demerits of the said Charley against each other. "He's not the least like Robert in the face."

"Which may be rather an advantage to him than otherwise," suggested Regy, making an effort to emerge from a painful labyrinth of reminiscent thought, into which, by the mention of the grievous yet voluntary sacrifices made by the gentlemanly, well-born Curate of Markinvale, he had been plunged. Sacrifices, by the way, for a pretty, fair-haired nonentity, who, at four-and-twenty, notwithstanding the births of her four children, and the *skrimpingness* as the pertest of her two pert young female servants called it) of the "living" at Cherry Cottage, had grown decidedly stout and

blowzy. "It certainly could not have been Askew's good looks which made that poor thing fall in love with him."

"I suspect," said Conrad, "that there was very little love on her side at all. There isn't, when women marry, in nine cases out of ten. What Lady Southmore's governess wanted, was a husband, and I don't suppose it much mattered to her what the man's face was like, or his intellects either, so long as he was able, as Laura's maid phrases it, to "keep her." It was a great pity that the big Australian did not take a fancy to Miss Maxwell. I shall always believe it was his violent spooning that drove poor little Lizzie from the Lees. I daresay the poor fellow forgot she wasn't a *gin*, and didn't live on caterpillars."

Regy got up a feeble laugh at this mild pleasantry; and then, being anxious to turn the conversation—one which was fraught with haunting memories that stung him (with how sharp a sting the sufferer only could have told)—he remarked, with apparent calm,

"You were talking of your old brother-officer, Charley Askew. Now what is it men see in him which they object to? Guy knows him a little—was introduced to him, I think, by Robert; and he—Guy, I mean—spoke of Colonel Askew as a man who was not—though nobody could tell exactly the reason why—generally popular."

"Nor is he, and yet it would be hard to say why. Let us ask Lolo," he suggested, gaily, as that young matron, who had the *entrée*, at all times and seasons, of Reginald's snug little sitting-room, came tripping in, with the intention, immediately expressed, of tempting her brother-in-law out into the sunshine.

"Wait a moment," Conrad said to her; "don't be impetuous. We'll come out directly. I want you to tell Regy what you think of Charley Askew."

"My dear Con! I only saw him twice; once at that horrid hot dinner at Philippe's, and afterwards when he came to call at the hotel."

"But can you understand at all, from what

you *did* see—you who flatter yourself that you are a judge of character—why it is that so many people, without being able to give a reason for it, dislike Charley Askew?”

“Well, *I* should say that it is because he seems to like himself so much. And then it isn't nice of him—is it, Regy?—never to have gone near those poor things at Cherry Cottage. How I wish I could hit upon some way to help them! There would not be much difficulty with *her*, I think, but Mr. Askew shuts himself up so, poor fellow, with his pride and poverty, that it looks hopeless at present. But come out now, Regy, won't you? It is such a glorious day!—and perhaps we shall have an inspiration. I can always think better out of doors than in—can't you?” she added, momentarily forgetting—as so many who have not lived habitually with the blind, are apt to do—that darkness and light, sunshine and shade, are to them, in so far as it is a question of eyesight, “both alike.”



## CHAPTER XI.

“**N**O, don’t draw the curtains, please, Susan. I would rather not. And leave the fire, too—I can’t bear the noise—it makes my head worse.”

It was a chilly evening in the early October, and the Susan thus apostrophised—(an extremely dingy specimen of a London maid-of-all-work)—had, a minute or so previously, entered, with her plump firm arms full of dry wood, and a “fire reviver,” the second floor parlour of No. 12, Well Street, with the laudable intention of making up—for the lamps were lighted outside, and the weather was dark and rainy—the fire of the lady who had, during the last six weeks, occupied, at the rent of twenty-

five shillings per week, the second-floor apartments of that decidedly not first-class-looking lodging-house.

“Whatever can Mrs. Fletcher be doing, as she don’t ring for her tea,” had said Mrs. Payne, the landlady of No. 12, and as inquisitive a body as ever devoted her spare time and thoughts to the agreeable task of putting, as regarded her neighbours’ affairs, two and two together. “She can’t have a spark o’ fire left, neither,” continued Mrs. Payne (who knew to a shovelful how much coal—charging a shilling a day for the precious black diamonds—she could afford—leaving of course a fair margin for profit—to allow her lodger) “not a spark. But are you *sure*, Susan,” she asked of that ubiquitous young person, who was at that moment busily employed in clearing away her mistress’s tea things, “that Mrs. Fletcher ain’t out? The room’s been as still as still all the afternoon; and I was near upon going in once, but I thought, maybe she’d got a ’eadache, and was lying down.”

"She might indeed, poor thing," rejoined Susan, giving a dexterous rub to the oil-cloth cover of the round tea-table. "She looked pale enough this morning; and as for breakfast, she did not eat as much as 'ud feed a sparrow."

"Well, if *she* hadn't her appetite," said Mrs. Payne, tactly, "there was Mr. Spooner, underneath, as got through enough for six. Where that man puts it all, is more than *I* can guess. I declare, it's enough to eat one out of house and home; and what with servants' laziness, and their nasty underhand ways—there, get along, do. Don't stand dawdling there, as if you was a duchess, and hadn't need to soil your 'ands with nothink at all. Take the wood and things, and ask Mrs. Fletcher if she ain't ready for shutting up. It's 'igh time. And draw the curtains; and make things look a little comfortable. You've no more gumption, you haven't, than if you'd just come out o' the work'us."

Being well accustomed to the sudden, and

not always for the better changes in her mistress's mood of mind, Susan, who was by nature good-tempered and sympathetic, allowed these slightly personal remarks to pass unheeded. She wasn't one—as the useful drudge, with more emphasis than elegance, expressed it—to “answer sauce”—added to which excellent quality of forbearance, there was a strong incentive to prompt obedience in the deep interest which the second-floor lodger, whose unnatural neglect of the comforts afforded by tea and a brisk fire had, whilst it so greatly excited the wonder of her landlady, awakened in the younger and softer bosom of Susan Bates the strongest feelings of interest and compassion.

The cause of this interest was neither the youth nor the beauty of the young woman, who, during the six months that she had passed in Well Street, had been growing, as day followed day, noticeably paler and less bright. It is usually, I ween, only the exceptional among the “sex” who are, by reason of their fellow-women's outward comeliness, drawn, as it were,

towards them ; and Susan Bates, being certainly far from "exceptional," would perhaps, had Mrs. Fletcher's complexion *not* been so purely fair, and her eyes less darkly beautiful, have even earlier learned to pity and admire her.

As it was, the opening of Susan's heart towards the pretty, stay-at-home young lodger was the immediate consequence of a discovery made by the hard-worked general servant, that Mrs. Fletcher's husband—the well-dressed gentleman, who seemed to trouble himself so wonderfully little about his wife and her concerns—was (in speech and manners, that is to say) unkind to that patient and greatly neglected young wife.

A fortnight and more had, on that rainy afternoon in mid-October, elapsed since the gentleman known in Well Street as Mrs. Fletcher's husband had put in an appearance at No. 12. It was the anniversary of *Lizzie's* wedding-day (the quick-witted reader has doubtless already given this lonely wife a name), and the return of a season which only a year before had been

passed by her with such widely different feelings and anticipations, would alone, had no other causes for anxiety and heart-sickness existed, have been sufficient to account for her more than usual lack of appetite, and for the look—one which seemed as though there was a far-off meaning in its dim fixedness—that so strangely altered the expression of her deep blue eyes.

She was pacing (after her summary dismissal of Susan, poor, rough-handed Susan, who had all the will, but none of the power to comfort) to and fro, from door to window, and back again, that small, and by time and smoke begrimed chamber. Such a dreary little promenade it was, and, but for one street-lamp far below, which sent the faintest of rays upon the window-panes, the solitary indulger in that monotonous exercise would have been well-nigh in the darkness, which, in some moods of mind, is so far more congenial than light.

Is she thinking, do you imagine, of Guy Temple, of the man whom she has sworn ever and always to love and honour, as she pauses

for a moment before one uncurtained window, down the glass of which the Autumn rain is slowly falling, and leans her forehead (caring nothing whether the fair white surface thereof is or is not likely to be, in consequence of this abnormal proceeding, "all (as Susan would say) over blacks," and looks out dreamily into the night?

It is very clear—and would be so, methinks, to even the least clear-sighted of lookers-on—that *Lizzie Temple* is not just now expecting that (to her) rare event, the coming of a visitor. Were she even looking for the coming of the husband, of whom—if Susan Bates is to be believed—*Lizzie* has such small reason to be fond, the lonely woman would certainly have been not only more careful in the matter of "blacks," but who would have been less oblivious of the fact that the masses of her light-brown and yellow-tinted hair were, after a fashion that was more picturesque than neat, coiled away from her small, delicate face, and that her dress, one which she had worn in her peaceful maiden

days—days which seemed to her now so very long ago—was tumbled and ill-arranged upon the graceful figure, that whilom claimed and obtained so much of her womanly care and attention.

But it is not in these respects alone that a change has come over the girl whom we last saw trembling under the eager solicitations of the man for whom, as she too late discovered, she did not feel that “perfect love which casteth out *fear*.” The sunny brightness which had been so characteristic of the face whose beauty had made the manhood of Guy Temple weak, was sorely dimmed and blighted. The expression of the eyes, too, had altered. The shy, upward glances in which her unprincipled lover, the deceiver whom she had now learned so thoroughly to despise, had fondly fancied that he traced the signs and symptoms of a passionate nature, were missing, never to return; for the dew had been dried from the flower, and from the fruit the bloom had been brushed away.



Lizzie's life, ever since she decided on ungratefully deserting the home which had so long sheltered her, had been one of constant disappointment and mortification. Had it been mad passion which had

“Stirred her blood in wild unrest,”

She might, for a brief space, till “love's sad satiety” had mingled its disenchanting bitter with the cup of joy, have been supremely happy; but, as I before said, Lizzie had mistaken for love that which was but a fleeting fancy born of her reigning wish, one which well-nigh approached to monomania, of being recognized in the world as the “lady” which she esteemed herself to be. Alas! for the number of “mighty contests” which “arise from little things!” If Lizzie Fairholme's grandfather had not been a baronet; and if, at the only ball she had ever been to (a charity one at Westhampton), the wife and daughters of the Mayor of that ancient city, a hosier by trade, had not treated her (an example which was followed by many of their calibre), as a person immeasurably their inferior, I doubt

much whether those fierce battles fought by Lizzie between duty and inclination—battles which invariably ended in the triumph of the latter—would ever have taken place. After that first letter to her uncle, a letter that was directed by Guy, and for the easy concoction of which, Lizzie, who had become by that time his wife, silently despised him utterly, no measures were taken by the Beamish family towards persuading the Lily of the Lees to return to the home in which her departure had left so cruel a blank.

“Let her be, boy, let her be,” the old man had said sternly. “If the foolish gell likes to be a kind of upper ladysmaid to great folks, why, let her, that’s all as I say. There ain’t no accounting for tastes. I s’pose it comes of her mother’s having married a gentleman. Ugh! if that’s all the good a person’s likely to get by having a drop o’ genteel blood inside ’em, I, for that matter, ’ad about as lief be a tinker.”

It was late in a blustering Autumn afternoon, and a regular equinoctial gale was having its

fling of "railing" round the old house, hitting it such bangs sometimes that, as Lizzie Fairholme, in olden days, had once, in merry mood said, "you might almost think that the wind had a spite against the walls, so thunderingly and with a will did it strike at them."

From end to end of the big stone-floored farmhouse kitchen and back again, to and fro restlessly, walked George Beamish, his hands in his trousers pockets, and his everlasting short black pipe in his mouth. There was a great pity, a pity that was increased, although the strongly-built, tender-hearted man probably knew it not, by the howling of the gate outside, in George's broad breast for his absent cousin. He felt (supremely ignorant as the poor fellow was of the all-important fact that, on the day previous, Lizzie had been united in the bonds of wedlock to a gentleman!) that it was so hard for such a tender, sensitive thing as pretty Liz to be alone amongst strangers; perhaps, too—for he had heard or read of such things—she might, on that wintry-sounding night, be in some

great rambling castle huge enough to lose one's self in, a castle in which masters and men, mistresses and serving-maids, were alike too grand to trouble themselves about a poor little girl, whose very helplessness gave her, George thought, so strong a claim to everybody's compassion.

He had an idea, which he was bold enough to give voice to, that his father was rather too hard upon Lizzie.

"You see, sir," he urged, "she's such a child yet! not twenty, and girls' notions are all foolishness at that age. Why, Lord bless you! a year hence, let her remember what she's done now, and I'll be hanged if I think that she'd believe it! It would all look, as it does to us, such downright nonsense."

"I don't know what she'll remember," growled the old man, who, though far, considering his years, from being dull of comprehension, required, like most of his class, that a novel idea should be placed before him in the simplest of imaginable forms. "I don't know anything what Lizzie

'll remember, but *I'm* not a-going to forget that she thought herself a deal too good for us, and——”

“Nay, nay,” struck in George, “that’s putting it a deal too strong. Lizzie thought great things—too much so—I grant you, of her father’s family; but it doesn’t follow, because of that, that she looked down upon her mother’s kin. ‘Twas a pity,” mused the poor fellow, who sometimes indulged himself in the cold comfort of fancying that, had “circumstances” been more propitious, he might have had some slender chance of winning the wayward beauty—“’twas a great pity, I think, that the poor child was ever told anything about this father, who died when she was such a little thing. Liz has been none the better for the knowledge, and you may be sure she’d never have learned anything about him from the Fairholmes. Much they’ve troubled themselves about her!”

“*Troubled* themselves, indeed!—not they. It’s I that have had the trouble and the ex-

pense. Look at the pianner in the parlour, and the schooling, and the clothes—for Lizzie was always dressed like a lady, let the other be who she would. Not that I grudged it to her, poor lass," he continued, after a pause, during which the really liberal-minded old farmer had felt a little ashamed of having introduced this sordid view of the subject to the notice of his son. "I'd ha' done more than that for my sister's child. It was your speaking of her father's family, George, as put me out. A mean lot they must be, as ever stepped on shoe-leather!"

"I don't quite know about their being mean," said George Beamish, who rather piqued himself on being impartially just to foes as well as friends. "They're proud, too, I daresay, in their way, are the Fairholmes, and they didn't like the marriage any more than you would think well of it, if either Bill or Jack were to turn to and marry a servant-gell. This sort of feeling is ridiculous, of course, and yet one may have it all the same," wound up George Beamish,

who, on the entrance of the younger of his two half-brothers, became suddenly silent, whilst whiffs from his well-blackened *dudeen* rose up to the old rafters of the huge open fire-place, and, it is to be hoped, improved the flavour of the sides of bacon and row of home-cured hams which were dangling from the smoke-darkened beams.

“The world goes on, but in a circle, and everything repeats itself.” Time and the hour had run through many a rough day, not only for the big Anglo-Australian, who had done his best to temper the wind for the shorn lamb, but for the poor *brebis égarée* herself, who, now that the earth has gone its inevitable round once more, is, in her turn, pacing, with troubled brain and dragging footsteps, a darkened room, whilst the Autumn winds,

“Wild spirits, moving everywhere,  
Destroyers and preservers,”

are raging outside, and within the breast of the lonely woman, a storm of regret and passion

sways restlessly her unstable thoughts, as though they were dead leaves feeling the impulse of the tempest's strength.

That Guy Temple comes but seldom to the only home in which, "for the present," he can afford to place his wife, and that, when he *does* find time and opportunity to visit that uninviting *séjour*, he is very far (morally speaking) from resembling the impassioned lover who had shown himself capable of making every sacrifice, even to that of honour, for her sake, is, I greatly fear, not the exciting cause to which may justly be attributed poor Lizzie's unsatisfactory condition of mind; nor is it the long-delayed realization of her hope (the hope to which Guy's early promises had taught her to cling) of having her marriage made public, that has robbed her cheek of its colour, and her eyes of the pure reposefulness which was once characteristic of the "Lily of the Lees."

Had there been love—a love especially which was founded on respect—in Lizzie's heart for her husband, hers was precisely the nature to



bear with long-enduring patience, and without one reproach, the full term of her probation ; but young Mrs. Temple had, early in her married life, learned to suspect that there existed some secret cause—even stronger than the one alleged—for concealing the step which Guy had taken. Lizzie's perceptions were naturally acute, and moreover it was her habit—one that is common with her sex—of judging both character and conduct from trivial circumstances ; and thus it came about that this high-spirited young woman, whose idea of a gentleman was, first and foremost, that he must be *sans peur et sans reproche*, had become possessed of the notion—vague, it is true, and formed, perhaps, of over-slight materials—that on Guy Temple's conscience lay the weight of an error of which he felt ashamed.

## CHAPTER XII.

THE first lifting, by a hair's-breadth only at first, of the veil which lay between Lizzie and the truth, came about after this wise. She had been married about six months—months which had brought in their train an amount of weariness, disappointment, and self-upbraiding—greater, it is to be hoped, than often, even after “passion has spent its novel force,” falls to the lot of a young and beautiful bride; and now the Winter had waned—that long, weary Winter, with its alternations of heavy snow, slushy thaws, and depressing fogs, and Spring, with its lengthened days, its biting winds and mocking sunshine—a sunshine which, like a fair, passionless woman, has more in it of light than

warmth—was once more giving ample proof to the world that, besides being decidedly unpleasant, an “east wind is neither good for man nor beast.”

But, in order to obtain a clearer idea of poor Lizzie’s condition of mind, when the secret which Guy had taken such pains to conceal—the secret, namely, that his life had become a burden to him, was to his wife a mystery no longer—it is necessary to take a retrospective glance at the course of events, as they marked for her the first twelve months of her married state.

The bride and bridegroom had, immediately after the marriage-ceremony, which was performed in an obscure London church, proceeded to Southampton, and thence taken passage, under the names of Mr. and Mrs. Fletcher, by steamer to Jersey. Guy’s devotion to his fair bride was just then intense, and as Lizzie, reclining on some cushions which were laid on the deck for her accommodation, reminded herself that the man who *fussed* about her with such an anxious desire for her comfort, was the medium

through which the desire of her heart had been accomplished, she pressed the fingers which had been lying passively in his with something of answering warmth, as she whispered softly,

“Dear Guy, how good you are to me!—so much better than I deserve. For every hour makes me feel more and more how wicked and ungrateful I have been to those who were so kind, so very kind, to me.”

And Lizzie—for the evening had closed in, and the mild Autumn night was lighted only by an early moon, which shimmered in the steel-grey sky above the travellers’ heads—leant her fresh young cheek against her husband’s breast, and after awhile, with his strong arm supporting her, sank (for the day had been for her a fatiguing one) into a tranquil slumber.

“Aren’t you afraid, sir, that your lady ’ll catch cold?” asked the second officer of the packet. “The wind’s freshening up a bit, but we shall have the moon giving plenty of light soon;” and the man, a sailor every inch of him, but possessed of no ornamental education to speak

of, stood with his elbow resting on the bulwark, looking down on the pale, perfect face, brought into strong relief by the sombre hue of Guy's rough pilot coat.

Mr. Dakin had no intention of being either forward or impertinent. He was a popular, garrulous, jovial character, with a quick eye for a pretty face, and with a rough, strong hand that was ever prompt to assist fair female passengers in any of the numerous, and frequently recurring straits to which "those who go down to the sea" in steam packets are subject. A better known, or a more deservedly liked man, whether on board his vessel or out of it, did not, in all the Southampton Packet Service, exist; and, so accustomed was he to be met half way in the small amenities which it was his habit to offer, that when, instead of so doing, the saturnine attendant on that attractive passenger continued, as though ignoring Mr. Dakin's presence, to smoke his cigar "insultingly," the second officer in command of the *Calshott Castle* considered himself to be mightily ag-

grieved thereby. An hour later, the susceptible sailor, having found a sympathising auditor in the person of a young English officer—a not unfrequent visitor to Southampton (with whom, by the way, Mr. Dakin was indulging in what *he* denominated a “cut” of cold roast beef in the cabin), gave vent to his feelings thus:

“What I say, sir, is that civility costs nothing. I’ve been now upon this station better than twenty years, and a more gentlemanly set of passengers, on the whole, couldn’t be than those we’ve had the pleasure of taking across; but there’s a fellow on deck there,” continued Mr. Dakin, digging the carving knife viciously into the underdone sirloin, “who, if gentlemanly manners was the test, has no more right to be in a first-class cabin than I have to sup in Buckingham Palace.”

“Some snob of a commercial traveller, I suppose,” suggested the dark-haired and gentlemanly, good-looking, young man who, with his elbows on the table, was gazing rather admiringly at the amount of nearly raw material stowed

away by the sailor. "They get the best of everything at the pot-houses—those fellows—"

"But they don't travel about with ladies," mused Mr. Dakin.

"He may be out for his honeymoon perhaps, if that sort of man *has* honeymoons," suggested the "passenger," whose name, as I may as well mention, was Askew, and who was bound to the port of St. Marlo, *en route* to Lower Brittany, in which little-travelled-in country he possessed an aunt, married to a French nobleman of the legitimist type.

"Not they—think too much of their money-making and samples of goods for that. Besides, the fellow up there, sir," pointing with his thumb towards the deck, "ain't of that sort. Jealous, I imagine," he added, trying ineffectually to suppress the "suggestive look" which, had his interlocutor been of his own "rank" in life, would have given point to the last remark.

Colonel Askew (he was only a Captain in H.M.'s Guards, but then that distinguished branch of the Service has, as we all know, its

peculiar privileges) smiled inwardly at Mr. Dakin's fatuity, and at once became possessed with a desire to hear more about the lady in question. If jealousy of any lovely creature on board the *Calshott Castle* were to be the "order of the day," surely, with Charley Askew on board, and to the fore, the hero of the piece could hardly be that stout, redfaced, black-whiskered sea dog of a sea-captain, who occasionally dropped his h's, called a girl a "gurl," and was in all probability "quite the ladies' man" in the society of those with whom the excellent fellow found himself at home.

In pursuance of this decision, Colonel Askew, who had already made the passage to St. Marlo several times, and rather patronized the "smart second officer of the boat," said incidentally,

"A pretty woman, eh? It must be good fun, I often think, to belong to a steamer, you must see such lots of them——"

"And precious many of the other sort too," laughed good-natured Mr. Dakin, who owed not a little of his well-merited popularity to the



oft-reported fact that he was quite as attentive to the stout and elderly "unprotected female," as to the fair maiden of blushing sixteen, or the buxomest frisky matron that ever, on a "dirty night," required to be "assisted" down the companion ladder. "But," he continued, "about the lady on deck—who, by the way, ain't going further than Jersey—she's about as 'andsome a gurl as I ever took across. Didn't you notice 'em, sir, when you came aboard? No, you was late, I remember; and what's more, I recollect now," filling himself a second jorum of Bass's "draught bitter" as he spoke, "that the fellow, **who has no more idea of manners than a rhinoceros**, seemed in no end of a hurry to get her down into the cabin——".

"Perhaps they ain't married at all," suggested Charley Askew, taking a flight so bold that it startled his companion, who whispered to him hurriedly to be cautious.

"Lord love'ee, sir," he said, "one mustn't talk of those things aboard a boat. Why, **everything a'most is overheard**. Wooden walls

have longer ears than stone ones ; and we might be had up for defamation before we know where we are."

Colonel Askew laughingly promised to remember the warning ; and then, after saying a few words to the effect that a trifle more ozone would improve the atmosphere of the saloon, he rose from the "form" on which he had been seated, and, after vigorously stretching himself (an operation which disclosed, to as many of those present who happened to be awake, about six feet three of slight, and, to borrow the language of flunkeyism, of *aristocratic* height), the inquisitive Guardsman made his way, up the companion-ladder, to the deck. Once there, he found no difficulty in discovering the objects of his curiosity. With the exception of a few men who, wrapped up warmly in pea-jackets and comforters, were vindicating their claims to the ownership of "sea legs," by walking briskly to and fro the quarter-deck, the only passengers, male or female, who had not taken refuge from the night air, *below*, were

the two who, according to Dakin's account, were snugly concealed beneath a heap of rugs, under the shelter of the weather bulwark.

Passing slowly near them, his lighted cigar between his lips, Charley Askew, whose normal condition it was to be engaged in some adventure, the interest of which centred in a woman, noticed that the man whose churlishness had called forth Mr. Dakin's strictures on his want of manners, was in a sitting posture, leaning his back against the bulwark, and evidently—for he too was smoking—awake, and, as Charley chose to imagine, on the alert.

He could not see the face of the man who, husband or no husband, had drawn his crushed wide-awake low over his brows, and was, moreover, in a bent position, which decidedly favoured the purpose, supposing Dakin's surmise to be correct, of concealment. As regarded also the attractions of the lady, our Lothario (for thus, albeit some said he was meant by Nature for better things, we fain must call him) was completely in the dark. With her fair face shaded

from the moonlight, and covered with that heap of "mauds" and railway-rugs, how was it possible to realize the delicate features and tall, graceful figure of Lizzie Temple?

The dark hours sped by, and ever and anon, whilst Guy, unable for the life of him to keep his eyes open, was nodding peacefully by her side, Lizzie, wide awake, and with her mind and imagination over-excited by the bewildering succession of events by which she had hurried on to her present strangely novel position, gazed up from time to time into the moonlight, and more than once marked, with a little wonder, the tall figure of a man—the only one save that of he at the helm—upon the poop, who, leaning against the vessel's side, had his face persistently turned towards her.

It might be that Guy remarked him too, for, when the morning began to break, he, in spite of Lizzie's timidly-expressed wish to see "the sunlight break above the sea," hurried her below; a move which he quickly followed up by diving, still in the same half-disguise, into

the unsavoury depths of the gentlemen's cabin.

It is broad daylight, and Guy Temple, with his wife hanging on his arm, is hurrying her on to the St. Helen's pier, when a tall man, not handsome, but decidedly gentlemanlike in appearance, suddenly confronts them, and, with extended hand, exclaims,

"Ah! Temple, how are you? I felt almost sure it was you;" and then, while Guy still pushes forward, he (Charley Askew, that is to say) waits for a response.

Which, although the speaker was once Conrad's brother-officer, and an intimate acquaintance of the younger Temples, comes in no cordial form. Indeed, so evident is the barrister's desire to cast him off, that Charley, a gentleman *quand même*, takes the hint, and, after bestowing a long look on Lizzie, during which the eyes of the bride chance (the effect of magnetism, probably) to meet his, he rapidly, and with a courteous lifting of his hat, a ceremony which certainly is not intended as a compliment to his male ac-

quaintance, disappears from the scene of action.

And Guy (so slight is his knowledge of female nature) congratulated himself in that Lizzie made scarcely any mention afterwards of the good-looking man, to whose advances her husband had responded with such scant civility. She might have bothered him with questions of who the fellow was, and why he (Guy) had not introduced him to her, and instead—but this Lizzie's husband was not shrewd enough to guess—she kept the matter secret in her breast, where it fermented silently, working no good either to herself or to the man from whose interests, his honour, and his respectability, hers could never more, in this world, be distinct or separate.

A considerable proportion of the late Autumn and Winter had been got through by Lizzie in apartments engaged for her by Guy in a small, newly-run-up, semi-detached villa, situated on what was once known as Hampton Common. It was through a fortunate concatenation—as Lizzie then deemed it—of circumstances, that, towards the end of October—a season when

London is odious, and the country is still not without some lingering charms—it suited Guy's plans that Lizzie should remove from the tiny Belgravian lodging, in which he had at first thought it well to locate her. It chanced that an old acquaintance of Miss Bainbridge's (Mrs. Blackstone, for so the lady was called, enjoyed the advantage of being the widow of an officer who had done the State good service in his time) was desirous of *lending* the small apartments in Hampton Court Palace, which a gracious and grateful Sovereign had bestowed on the widow for her residence, to any lady or gentleman possessed of a moderate-sized house in London, which he or she would be willing to *lend* for three or four months in exchange. On hearing of this opening for a negotiation, Miss Bainbridge, who was a dear lover of change, and who, moreover, had a fancy for trying how she would feel as an inmate of the big square building, which some irreverent wag has dared to designate as the "Quality Poorhouse," caught at her old acquaintance's proposal at once ; and

as Guy, for many reasons, decided that it would "suit his book" best to have Lizzie in what is still called, by courtesy, the country, it followed that Miss Bainbridge's installation in Mrs. Blackstone's dingy apartments was almost simultaneous with that of old John Beamish's niece in the small rooms, newly furnished with the cheapest of chairs and tables, and smelling of paint, low-priced carpets, and varnish, in which Mrs. Fletcher (the first tenant which Harcourt Villa had as yet welcomed within its walls) was to make herself as comfortable and contented as the nature of the case admitted of.

"And I don't think, Liz," said Mr. Temple, after he had spent a good deal more time and attention than his wife thought the matter required, on the subject of small economies, "that you need go in for puddings and that kind of thing. They cost a lot of money, and the people of the house will eat twice as much of them as you will."

Now I would not, on any account, have it supposed that—albeit this suggestion by the



man whom she was bound by her oath to honour and obey, excited in Lizzie's mind a stronger feeling of distaste than had ever yet found a place within her breast, against her husband—my heroine could be justly accused of the sins of greediness and extravagance. She was well aware, and had, since her marriage (an event which dated now some five weeks back) acted, to the best of her power, in accordance with that conviction, that they had not, as the saying is, "too much money to throw away." Her appetite was small, and her tastes simple. Give her enough—let that "enough" consist of nothing more tempting to the palate than bread and water—to satisfy the requirements of nature, and, provided that the part of Hamlet were not left out, or, in other words, that the precious condiment of love were present at the feast, I doubt much whether there would be anywhere found a young woman better contented with a "dinner of herbs" than Lizzie Temple.

But in order to arrive at this Utopian condi-

tion of feeling, a certain element of romance is absolutely needful. There is something, before the honeymoon has waned, terribly disenchanting in the details of domestic economy; and to be seriously warned by the man for whose dear sake the woman feels herself capable of enduring the hardest of privations, against the prodigality and self-seekingness of pudding-eating, must be, methinks, to say the least of it, a trial.

And yet—in this, as in a thousand other instances of the kind—it was more the manner in which the suggestion was made, than the suggestion itself, that did the mischief. There is not one man in a hundred who can—without losing prestige in his wife's sight—descant seriously, and with evidently deep interest in the matter, on such minor details of household economy as are generally supposed to be within a woman's province to attend to, and when, as in the present instance, the bride, sensitive and dowerless, is thus coarsely—in her opinion—reminded of the fact that, but for her, the disagreeable necessity of taking care of the pence

would not, for the aggrieved husband, have existed, contempt for that husband's lack of delicacy and tact is almost certain to culminate in disgust.

In order to understand how it chanced that the "lovely toy so fiercely sought" had—so much earlier in the day than might have been reasonably expected—"lost its charm by being caught," it is only necessary to remember how terrible had been the cost to Guy Temple of making that coveted plaything his own, whilst under the spell of the o'ermastering passion which

"Did work like madness in his brain."

the fact that he could not after his marriage keep, even for a single day, his Fellowship, without dishonour, was one which, strange to say, he never appeared to realize; and when the time for awakening came—as come it surely did—he told himself (relieved perhaps—so strange is the constitution of the human mind!—by the excuse for inaction) that it was too late .

—he having been then some weeks a married man—to redeem the time.

But, whilst arriving at this fatal conclusion, a more miserable man than Guy Temple can hardly be imagined. Looking back upon the past with eyes from which the mists of passion had rolled away, his own conduct, in that he had so utterly and entirely *sacrificed himself*, seemed perfectly incomprehensible to Guy. *Quos Deus vult perdere prius dementat*; and that *he* must have been, when he decided on marrying Lizzie Fairholme, stark, staring mad, was, in the opinion of selfish, unprincipled Guy, the only solution of the mystery.

“Good G—! what a fool I have made of myself! What an egregious, miserable idiot! And all because a little ambitious girl (whom I wish to Heaven I had never set eyes on) has known how to play her cards so well, that *she* has got all she wanted; whilst I—well I suppose there is nothing left for *me* but to put a pistol to my head; for to live this life is more than I can stand!”

Guy Temple had not been a married man one quarter of a year, when he found himself thus mentally giving voice to this expression of his feelings. It was too soon for even one so self-engrossed, and so lacking in delicacy of feeling as Miss Bainbridge's *protégé*, to make of his young wife the confidant of his regrets; nevertheless, there *were* times—those times especially when Lizzie seemed most thoroughly forgetful of the *fact* that he had offered himself up as an oblation to her—when Guy Temple, the scion of an ancient stock, felt strongly inclined to make John Beamish's niece understand that he, for the act which, in his haste, he had committed, was repenting, and that very sorely, now that the time for thinking at leisure had arrived.


## CHAPTER XIII.

CERTAINLY the two months passed by Lizzie at Harcourt Villa were not calculated to make the irreparable step which she had taken seem more lovely in her sight. She had nothing to do, a trial in itself to one whose hours and days had hitherto been, comparatively speaking, far from unemployed; and, worse evil by far than this, the hope, the ambition which made castle-building for her so delightful an occupation, were now realised, and what—she sometimes bitterly asked herself—was the result?

She had married a “gentleman”—a gentleman—that is, by birth and station (and, as yet

Lizzie had no suspicion that Guy had done naught to forfeit that rather too common claim to distinction), but, as honest John Beamish's niece found herself more than once whispering to the *70 eye*, which is ever at hand, a sympathising confidant in our troubles, if the life that she was leading at that dismal villa were a normal one amongst ladies, why, the idea which she had previously formed of the beatified condition of those favoured ones, was very clearly a most miserable mistake.

And she had sacrificed so much (Guy's own words, strange to say, whilst speaking of *his* givings up for the pretty trifle he had coveted) for the end which now appeared to her to be of much little worth! At home (in the old days, which now seemed to have been so far happier than she had thought them then) Lizzie Fairholme, the "officer's daughter," the "Lily of the Lees," with blue blood in her delicate veins, and with nothing of peasant breeding betrayed either in voice, or form, or manner, was looked upon and treated in some sort like a little



queen. Even her uncle, that dictatorial old man, with his strong voice and iron will, spoke tenderly, and almost deferentially, to Lizzie; and now he—her husband, ashamed and *afraid*—ah! there lay *one* terrible cause of the young wife's growing contempt for the husband whom her own weakness had placed in authority over her, to own her publicly as his wife, had already begun (at least, so thought this silly, sensitive Lizzie—for all women cannot at nineteen be philosophers) to treat her with far less of courtesy and respect than she felt to be her due.

Had Mrs. Temple loved the man whom she had married with only half the amount of passion which she once fancied existed in her breast (I speak of the early days of his courtship) for Guy Temple, there would have been none of these *petites misères* of Lizzie's *vie conjugale* to record; and that she did not so love him was, I think, more due to an inherent absence of worth in the man than to any especial fickleness in the woman who, so early in her married life, found that she had hampered



herself with vows to love and honour him which were impossible for her to keep.

Only two events, and those apparently of a trivial character, broke the sameness of Lizzie's stay at Harcourt Villa. Twice, during her solitary walks in Bushey Park, she *chanced*, as she would herself have termed it, although we who are in the secret know that only the *first* meeting was accidental, to come across, as the saying is, that acquaintance of Guy's whom the latter had, on board the Jersey steamboat, showed so decided an inclination to avoid.

She was walking (her only companion being a gratefully affectionate little mongrel dog, the absurdly ugly result of a cross between a Skye-terrier and a pug, belonging to the people of the house, who, by the way, rarely remembered to feed it) near the artificial pond known to those who live in the neighbourhood of that royal demesne as "Diana Water," when the sound of rapidly approaching wheels roused her from a fit of deep meditation, and caused her, in alarm for "Pippin," who had demonstrated an

early talent for being run over, to look round suddenly and call the dog to her side. In a moment—it all happened so quickly that, on looking round, Lizzie could hardly persuade herself that she had not “meditated” the scene—the dog-cart, for such the vehicle proved to be, pulled up, and from the driving-seat a gentleman sprang down. One glance was sufficient to show to Lizzie that the tall man who accosted her with, as she did not fail to observe, an especially graceful salutation, was no other than the one who had once before seen her in circumstances which must, as even this country-raised girl, with her limited knowledge of “life,” could not but be aware, have seemed to him, to say the least of it, suspicious.

The recollection made her blush violently, a phase in the position of affairs which certainly rather surprised Charley. It would, however, have been, he thought, an “awful” pity if she had lost the art of “colouring up ; it made her look a thousand times handsomer than paint, by Jove!”

But to return to Lizzie, whom we left with trembling Pippin in her arms, devoutly wishing that the man with the bold eyes, who was whispering, she scarcely knew what, apologies in her bewildered ears, would drive away, and leave her to her own not very lively society again.

"I'm so sorry I frightened you! I didn't see you till we came round the turn there. Hold his head, can't you, stupid!" (this to the duodecimo edition of a groom, who, at every toss of the big horse's shapely head, seemed to run considerable risk of being whipped off his legs.) "And your pretty little dog—poor thing! Isn't he a little deaf? I wouldn't have driven over him for the world."

And Charley Askew, not finding (though, to do him justice, he was seldom at a loss for words) his present supply of small-talk quite equal to the demand, made as though he would pat the head of the interesting animal which nestled so closely (for Pippin was a dog of sense, and knew as well as most of his tribe when he was well off) to Mrs. Temple's side.

Feeling both frightened and annoyed by this advance towards familiarity, Lizzie stepped back hastily, letting, (quite unintentionally,) as she did so, the poor little cur fall to the ground. Pippin, angry in his turn, and frightened, set up a violent yelp of defiance, making himself even more personally ridiculous than usual, by jumping, with evidently hostile intentions, round the stranger's legs; a performance which, most unfortunately, since it deprived her of all power of conducting herself with "dignity," so greatly tickled Mrs. Temple's sense of the ludicrous, that she could not, whilst endeavouring to make Pippin behave himself like a well-bred dog, prevent herself from laughing—a laughter in which Charley, having a lively recollection of the French proverb which commences with the words, "*Femme qui rit*," &c., &c., joined; and then, the cause of their hilarity being reduced to silence, and "Stupid" having apparently a better chance with his master's horse whilst that showy animal was in motion, the quintett—bipeds and quadrupeds together

—walked on for a few yards in amicable mood.

“He’s a very cross little dog, but he isn’t mine,” Lizzie, who felt ashamed both of her companion’s conduct and appearance, said. “I only take him out because nobody else does.” And having thus apologised for the canine insult offered to this polite gentleman, who was, if not Guy’s friend, at any rate his acquaintance, Lizzie suddenly remembered that she did not even know the name of her companion, whilst he—in what “horrible” light might he not—so Lizzie told herself—regard her? As a lost, degraded woman, probably, was the quick answer conscience gave, for was she not a party to deceit? And could there be, in some respects, a viler wretch than she?

For a few moments Charley watched the changes in the fresh young face wonderingly. Well he knew that faces were often as deceptive as their owners, and that a countenance of Madonna-like purity has often been the mark to hide innate depravity and sin; but notwithstanding this fixed conviction on his part, he

could discover a certain undescrivable "something" about this "girl" (for as a girl, ever since her laugh had rung out with such a joyous frankness, he had considered her) which was utterly at variance with the notion that she could be other than she seemed. And yet how difficult—how almost impossible was it to reconcile that belief with the situation in which it had been his (Charley Askew's) lot to meet her. Alone with a man under thirty, leaning, in the stillness of the dark night, upon his breast, and concealed by him with a care which was terribly suggestive of the worst!

Charley Askew's acquaintance with Guy Temple was but slight. He had met "Con's" brother occasionally, and more because of the brother's near relationship to popular Conrad than from any liking to the man, had once asked him to dinner, when he (Charley) happened to be on guard at the Bank. There was nothing genial about Guy. His very profession—though heaven knew that practice in that line he had but little!—was against his obtain-

ing amongst the Guardsmen's "set" the character of a "good fellow;" whilst of "pleasant vices," Colonel Askew had never happened to hear that the "good-looking prig," who was in every respect such a contrast to "old Con," possessed any of which he could be deemed guilty.

Finding it utterly impossible, during the few moments that he remained silent, to reconcile these discrepancies, and his opinion being, it must be owned, on the whole, against the probability of that exquisitely pretty girl being as good as she looked, Askew, with some approach to a *galanterie de garnison*, which could only, in the event of his proving correct in his surmises, have had any chance of being tolerated, said,

"The dog's no beauty, certainly, but I shall be eternally grateful to him for introducing us. I as nearly as possible drove over his tail, poor fellow; but if you will allow me, I should be so grateful—you don't look as if you *could* refuse, and you ought to have a pretty dog—if you would only tell me where I might bring it to, I know such a little beauty——"

He had proceeded thus far before Lizzie had made up her mind as to what she could either do or say. You must bear in mind, O gentle reader, that this singularly-circumstanced young person was but a country girl, her age only nineteen, and the scanty knowledge of how, in difficult positions, to demean herself which she possessed, was drawn almost entirely from books. It requires, methinks, some experience of men and manners, together with a greater amount of hardihood than was likely to fall to the share of one brought up as Lizzie Fairholme had been, to enable a young lady to take her own part with spirit, and snub (as no doubt he richly deserved to be snubbed) such a *cour-  
eur des dames* as Charley Askew. Mrs. Guy Temple was no fool, and was thoroughly aware that nothing short of his conviction that she had forfeited the right to be treated "like a lady," would have caused the man who was walking by her side, and who, albeit less handsome, was far more *distinguished*-looking than Guy, either to ask her where she lived, or to



offer to present her with a dog. The mere act of speaking to her as he had done was, she felt, an insult; and that she did so feel it, Lizzie endeavoured to make apparent, as she broke into the midst of her companion's eager speech with a refusal which was intended to be sternness itself.

"Thank you—you are very kind, but I could not receive such a present. I want no dog, and should be much obliged," she was about to add, "if you will drive away, and not follow me as you are doing, against my will," when Askew eagerly interrupted her, thereby showing that the lady's manner lacked the extreme severity of displeasure which she trusted that her words would have implied.

"Perhaps *he* wouldn't let you take it—Guy Temple, I mean," he continued, in a whisper. "But do tell me, now, there's a sweet creature, where you are to be found. I've thought of you so much since that night—the night you spent on the deck of the *Calshott Castle*, don't you remember? I couldn't see your face till

the daylight came, but something told me you were beautiful, and——”

“Oh! *do* stop. You have no right to speak to me in this way!” exclaimed Lizzie; and in her voice there was a ring of such genuine distress that even sceptical Charley Askew felt convinced that, though erring, there must, in her case, be so many extenuating circumstances, that even a jury of starched old British maids could hardly do otherwise than recommend her to mercy. “It isn’t like a gentleman,” she went on, passionately, her fixed idea working again “to the front,” as she came to a halt, and with her blue eyes flashing, and her small head thrown proudly back, confronted her adversary. “It isn’t like a gentleman to speak in the way you are doing to a lady, and if Mr. Temple were here, and could know it all, he would show you how wrong you are. And, oh! *do*,” she continued, almost piteously, as the idea of how very unpleasant it would be if the old proverb were to be realized, and Guy were really to stand before them in the flesh, flashed across

her mind. "In my power now! I don't want  
 to be ruled by anybody! I'm in it in my  
 spirit of revenge—but—but here she goes  
 and suggests the momentary higher good and  
 being very much a morning companion  
 enough to make for her time in right to  
 be so very deplorably weak, as if she were  
going very!"

This was a disappointing and unsatisfactory  
 wind-up, certainly, to a dialogue which at one  
 time seemed to be taking a turn that looked  
 far from unpromising; but in such a case, no  
 man possessed of even a moderate share of  
 delicacy and good-feeling, could have hesitated  
 a moment as to the course it behoved him to  
 pursue; and Charley Askew, not being of the  
 number of those to whom such an appeal as  
 Lizzie's was likely to be made in vain, held out  
 his hand, with a frankness which did him, in her  
 opinion, no ill-service, and said, with a courtesy  
 which greatly helped to put Mrs. Temple on  
 better terms with herself,

"A thousand pardons! I would not annoy

you for the world! I don't know what possessed me. Another time, I shall hope"—with a light laugh that disclosed two rows of perfect teeth—"for a regular introduction, and through our friend Temple, eh?" were his last words, as Lizzie, blushing beautifully, and too eager for him to be gone to pay much attention to his words, made her slight salaam to the most notorious as well as the most successful *roué* in Her Majesty's Household Brigade.

## CHAPTER XIV.

LIZZIE returned to her small ground-floor apartment in Harcourt Villa, with her mind all in a whirl with the contending emotions which this adventure had conjured up. The emotions were more pleasurable, I fear, than otherwise, for she had grown weary of the monotony of her life, a monotony which Guy—who had evidently fallen into the (by Benedicts) commonly received opinion that the object of a woman's existence, namely, the attainment of a husband, being once fairly achieved, she ought therewith to be content—did not much trouble himself to render less dangerously unendurable.

Lizzie was kept, not only by her own innate

purity, but by her extraordinary ignorance of the world and its ways, from feeling as indignant as must otherwise have been the case, both with her husband, the stranger, and herself. There is also (and of this fact Mrs. Temple could have acknowledged the truth) a great support in the consciousness of suffering innocently. Nor did the "romance," as she, in her girlish folly, termed it, "of the thing," turn its pleasant side to her in vain. The day would come, she told herself, when that daring friend of Guy's, whose eyes were so wonderfully penetrating, and his voice so soft and deep-toned, must learn all about her; and then they two (for Lizzie quite acknowledged to herself that she would like to have on her visiting-list the name of this *preux chevalier*) might, as they chose, laugh together at the Bushey Park adventure, and at the ugly little mongrel, the ownership of which she had shown herself so absurdly anxious to deny.

It was after this fashion that Mrs. Temple, during the day and a half which elapsed before

she had an opportunity of relating what had passed to her husband, allowed her thoughts—enlivened by this exciting little episode—to wander a-field. That her relation would have the effect of proving to Guy how impossible it was for her to remain in her present false position, Lizzie nothing doubted. He would be annoyed, of course, and probably be a trifle angry with her for having, by her imprudence, brought about this very inconvenient state of things; but that would be all, and very soon—sooner by far than Guy had led her to hope—she would take her proper place in society, and live no longer the dreary life to which this “horrid mystery” had condemned her.

It was a charming dream, and helped to pass away some lonely hours which, but for those rose-coloured reveries, might have dragged on wearily enough; but satisfied—ay, and more than satisfied—as Lizzie told herself, that, with the present aspect of her affairs, she was, her heart *did* throb somewhat inconveniently fast (and, I trow, that the accelerated beats were not

caused by unmixed joy at the sight of her husband's face) when, late in the evening of the day following that on which the adventure took place, Guy—slightly moist, and a trifle “put out,” for it was raining heavily, and, in order to save a shilling (as he took care to say) he had walked from the station—placed his cold, wet cheek to hers.

The contact seemed to chill her to the bone, and the small room, with its ill-cleaned lamp and fire of small dusty coal, had never looked so mean and uninviting before. During a passing moment—so terribly easy is it for one human being to work moral evil in another—Lizzie's courage failed her, and she half-determined—Guy looked so little likely to take the matter pleasantly—to keep silence on the subject of her chance interview with his *friend*. Her mind was, however, actually so brimming over with the subject, that, after the smart lodging-house “parlour-maid” had removed the cloth (they had but that one sitting-room, and Guy, who, in reality, was not in the



slightest degree "bored" by *post-prandial* odours, complained bitterly of their infliction upon his well-bred nostrils), Lizzie, feeling a little nervous, albeit Guy's spirits—*id est*, his temper—did seem, under the influence of warmth and a tolerable dinner, to be improving, prepared herself to make a clean breast of it to her husband.

Seated directly in front of him, with her rounded arm (a trifle less white, perhaps, than that of a "fine lady"), from which the open sleeve had fallen back, resting on the table, Guy Temple's bride—the bride of that dishonoured "fellow"—was looking wonderfully attractive, so attractive that the said "fellow" forgot for the moment to remember how poor were the straits to which his love (?) had reduced him, and how great was the contrast afforded by that dessert of herbs, or, to abandon metaphor, of nuts and apples, to the display, on snowy damask, of attractive luxuries to which, from youth upwards, his eyes had been accustomed.

Lizzie had debated more than once with herself—a proof, had any proof been wanting, that the subject was to her one of no slight importance—on the best method of introducing it to Guy; yet, when it came to the point, she could think of nothing better by way of prelude, than the simple words which follow:

“Such an odd thing, Guy, happened while you were away!” And then she stopped, whilst a flood of crimson—a very tidal wave of a blush—swept over cheek and brow.

Guy, after intonating a “Well?” which certainly did not tend to lend fluency to her speech, fixed his eyes on the pretty, flushed face inquiringly.

“Oh, there isn’t much to tell,” she, with an utterly futile attempt to give the affair a light and airy turn, continued. “I was walking yesterday in Bushey Park——”

“Where you had no earthly business to be walking. I have told you fifty times, if I have told you once——”

“Not *quite* so often as that,” Lizzie, with

something of playful defiance in her tone, broke in. "And, besides, Guy, you *might* listen to me for a minute or two. I haven't much opportunity of talking, and I think," speaking more seriously now, "that you *ought* to know what I have to tell you."

His only answer was a shrugging of the shoulders, intended probably to express resignation under a not-to-be-escaped-from infliction, and the heaping on his plate of more cob-nuts, with which to try the powers of a digestion which had never—one cause, perhaps, of his frequent ill-humour—been remarkable for strength.

Under these unauspicious circumstances, poor Lizzie continued her revelation; and as she did so, can we be surprised at the melancholy fact that more than once she, in the course of her short narrative, involuntarily drew a mental parallel between the courteous, pleasant-voiced stranger and the moody man whose authority she had no right to resist, which was certainly not to the advantage of the latter.

"It was quite early in the day," she said;

"long before any smart people were likely to be about, and I *am* so tired, Guy, of walking about among houses! It is so nice to see the deer, and smell the dead leaves."

"An odd taste," put in, with something approaching to a sneer, materialistic Guy.

"Yes, I daresay you think so," the girl said eagerly; "men so often, I believe, think that kind of feeling nonsense; but they take me back—the wet, fallen leaves, I mean—to home again, and to the time when I was almost a child, and used to hunt in the Temple Court woods for primrose roots to transplant into my garden; and once, I remember, your brother Reginald—it was before he was blind, poor fellow——"

"Hadn't you better go on with your story?" interrupted Guy; and Lizzie, not being in the secret of his inner feelings, thought, as she obeyed the marital hint, that his voice sounded unusually harsh and unsympathetic. The tears too—for some tender chord of memory had been struck—were standing in her eyes, as she

said, with a successful effort at recovering herself,

“ Well, perhaps, I only wanted, as the French say, to distract myself—anyway, however, I *went*, that is quite clear ; and, moreover, I took Pippin with me, and the poor little beast—he is always in trouble of some sort—was nearly run over by a dog-cart, and in the dog-cart was that gentleman—the one who spoke to you on the Jersey packet, and he was so civil——”

“ Good G— ! you don’t mean to say that he remembered—that he talked to you ?”

“ Oh ! yes, he did,” said Lizzie, who, now that the ice was fairly broken, took a strange kind of exciting pleasure in the conversation. “ I think he was afraid that Pippin was hurt, for he got out of the carriage, and the dog was so ungrateful and tried to bite his legs ! And it was so ridiculous, that we both laughed. But,” continued Lizzie, cutting short—for Guy’s countenance had grown very lowering—her narrative, “ his horse—such a beautiful creature it was, with an arched neck—wouldn’t stand still, so

he soon drove off, saying, as he went, that he should ask *you* to introduce him to me."

By this time Guy, unable to endure with outward composure the strain upon his nerves, left his seat, and, after taking a hurried turn or two through the circumscribed space of the little parlour, finally took his stand upon the hearthrug, from which vantage ground he, in tones of concentrated passion, said,

"Confounded impudent fellow! How dared he presume to—but—" correcting himself suddenly, and as though conscious of being on the wrong tack, he turned upon Lizzie with bitter and angry reproaches. "It must have been your own doing—you brought it upon yourself. No gentleman—and Charley Askew *is* a gentleman——"

"Yes, one can see *that* at once," parenthesised Lizzie, in a kind of half aside, the significance of which was felt more than he would have liked to have had appear by Guy, who, without apparently noticing the interruption, continued,

with the same angry vehemence, his attack upon his wife.

"It is always a woman's own fault when that kind of thing happens. Of course, if they put themselves in the way of being insulted——"

"Or are put into it by others! Now, Guy! Don't you know, can't you see that this is all your fault, and that——"

"*My* fault? Good G—, Lizzie, what are you talking of? You know, when I married you that this—er—this kind of thing might happen, and you ought to have been more careful, upon my soul, you ought. The position is a most unpleasant one for me——"

"And for me too, I think you will own that," Lizzie said proudly. "This gentleman, who has seen me alone with you, what must his opinion of me be? It is horrible to think of! And then you talk of my putting myself in the way of being insulted! Oh! Guy! I thought you would have taken this so differently—I thought that——"

"You imagined perhaps that this annoyance—for it *is* a great annoyance to me in every

way—would have had the effect of inducing me to make our marriage public? Was not this so, eh?”

“Certainly it was. How *could* I suppose that you would knowingly expose me to such misconstructions—such——”

He interrupted her by laying his hand gently, but yet firmly on her arm.

“My dear Lizzie,” he said, “you may be assured that I feel these painful consequences of our—our marriage fully as much as you do; but, with Hamlet, we may think it better to ‘bear those ills we have than fly to others that we know not of!’”

“But there *couldn't* be worse ills, dear Guy,” Lizzie, looking up with pleading eyes into his face, said. “There might be mortifications, and—as you say it is so—I conclude that Miss Bainbridge would, at first, be very angry; but *that* would be nothing compared to this cruel pain—this terrible disgrace!”

“*Disgrace!* Nonsense!” he said, coarsely; and I think that what love still remained for him in Lizzie’s breast died out then and there.



"You have got what you wanted, and you ought to be satisfied."

He spoke in angry haste, goaded on to bitter speech by so keen a sense of his own irretrievable guilt and shame that may be, filled with passionate indignation at his taunt though she was, even Lizzie, could she have looked into the man's miserable breast, and realized the violence of the storm that raged therein, might have found it in her heart to pity him. She took her punishment very quietly, possibly recognizing its justice, and long before the evening had waned, Guy, regretful and ashamed, would have given much to make his peace with that ag-grieved and silent woman. But, as we all know, it is one thing to light a fire, and another to put it out; one thing to let off steam, and another to do away with the evil results of the explosion. Guy Temple could not—so fatally was he "meshed" in the tangled web of deceit which he had woven—make a clean breast of it to Lizzie; and never did he feel his terrible position more acutely than when his wife,

making a final effort to save his honour and her own, said, with a sorrowful curl of her perfect lip, "If this Mr. Askew is, as you say, a gentleman, why not confide the secret to his keeping?" he found himself forced to answer, decisively,


"Say no more, Lizzie. I regret the necessity fully as much as you can do, but what you ask is a total and absolute impossibility."

Guy Temple's bitterest enemy (say honest George Beamish, had he known all) would, methinks, have been almost willing—could he have looked into the speaker's shame-charged heart—to admit that the guilty man's meed of punishment was nearly sufficient for his deserts.

## CHAPTER XV.

CHARLEY ASKEW was not the kind of man to be easily baffled by a first failure of any scheme on the success of which he had set his mind; and therefore, acting, as was his usual custom, on the principle of his favourite motto, "*Si c'est possible, cela ce fait, si c'est impossible, cela se fera,*" he set certain engines, in which he had faith, and of which money was the motive power, to work, and without either much delay, or any extraordinary difficulty, discovered the place of "Mrs. Fletcher's" temporary abode.

The Winter had by that time fairly set in, and the time for Lizzie's migration to London was near at hand. The season, even had her inclination prompted her to "explore" the sur-



rounding country, was not a favourable one for long, solitary walks; and thus it happened that the only opportunity—eagerly as he had sought for one—which Charley enjoyed (?) of a meeting with the beautiful girl of whose relations with Guy Temple he (the Guardsman) could not, strange though the fact appeared, entertain any reasonable doubt, was in the shop of a perfumer and hair-dresser, to the shelter of which “Mrs. Fletcher” had, from a driving shower of snow and sleet, betaken herself. She had been for ten minutes at least in an atmosphere that was heavily redolent of jasmine hair-oil, Windsor soap, and attar of roses, and, having concluded a small purchase, was endeavouring to find some subject of conversation with the mistress of the establishment—(a lady of uncertain age, whose “wealth,” as the novelists say, of shining *plaits*, to say nothing of her *chignon*, would have done honour to even a larger “house of business” than the one of which Mrs. Norris was the useful ornament)—when the attention of the lady with the splendid *cheve-*

*lure* was diverted from her female customer by a question, asked in a peculiarly pleasant, although a slightly drawling voice—one which Lizzie recognised at once—about *brushes*.

The sudden turn of the small, graceful head brought forth a well-acted expression of surprise from Charley Askew, who, *en homme bien appris*, betrayed, when “Mrs. Fletcher” (Lizzie wondered to herself how he *could* have learned the name she “went by”) exclaimed artlessly, as they shook hands, “How very odd that you should have taken refuge here too!” no outward sign of doubting that the astonishment which those lovely lips expressed was genuine and sincere.

“And so you really think that, if I set to work in earnest to find out all about you, there is the least chance of my failing?”

During the brief period which elapsed before Lizzie, who was umbrellaless, could risk her pretty hat, with its coquettish feather, in the fresh outer air again, Charley had proved him-

self to be such "good company" that Mrs. Norris, whom he very judiciously did not entirely exclude from the conversation, of which he bore almost entirely *les frais*, pronounced him afterwards to be very pleasant, and "quite the gentleman." As for poor Lizzie's character, which had already been a good deal torn and rent by the gossip-lovers and tittle-tattlers of New Hampton, it got, I fear, an additional *coup de griffe* from the practised hands of the worthy perfumer's childless wife.

"Such a bold-faced hussy as she looked!" was Mrs. Norris's after-comment to a fellow-gossip, on the part borne by "Mrs. Fletcher" in the scene. "I declare, if I was as tall, and looked as showy as she does, I'd wear a decent bonnet, and not a hat cocked on my nose, as that 'Mrs. Fletcher' does. 'Mrs. Fletcher,' indeed!—as if her name wasn't just as likely to be Thomson or Jenkins! And she to be walking away with the gentleman, as bold as brass!—a *real* gentleman *he* is—you might take your oath to that. But as for her——"

And Mrs. Norris, with a toss of the shiny head which, by Norris's friends and customers, was generally supposed to perform a similar duty to that required of the waxen lay figures which we have all admired in the windows of emporiums such as that over which Mrs. Norris presided, broke off abruptly, wishing, probably, her hearers to understand that it was not for her to "soil her tongue" with further words, touching the character of "Mrs. Fletcher."

But it is high time to turn from the village scandal-monger, for whose *idle tongue* "Satan has found plenty of mischief" to do, in order that we may follow the footsteps of the pair who, in the face of a sharp south-easterly wind, which, strive as it may, is utterly powerless either to rob Lizzie's cheek of its delicate bloom, or paint, with the faintest tinge of unbecoming carmine, the dainty but somewhat saucy little nose which Charley Askew, as side by side with its owner, he winds his way through slippery slush and mire, glances at so admiringly.

Amongst other discoveries made anent "Mrs.


Fletcher" by this *entreprénant* cavalier, there was the important one that, early in the following week the ground-floor apartments of Harcourt Villa would be vacant; for that "Mrs. Fletcher" was going away, to London it was thought, but "nothing certain was *know'd*—the lady wasn't free with her tongue, as some lodgers was, and as she hadn't no servant, which looked a'most as if she warn't a real lady, though to be sure she talked like one, it was all, as you may say, guess-work about her."

Guess-work, indeed! Nor did it appear likely that, even from the "fountain head," now that he had found, or made, the opportunity of testing his powers of persuasion, Charley would obtain the information which he craved.

When Lizzie found herself alone, so to speak, in the well-filled thoroughfare, with the man who, as her woman's instinct told her, designed (Fate and the gods permitting) to play an important part in the drama of her life, a certain reserve—the invisible coat of mail which a pure-hearted and innocent woman unconsciously



dons when she finds herself alone with danger—stole over her voice and manner. In the close quarters of Mrs. Norris's stuffy little shop, it had been impossible, she told herself, to treat him otherwise than as a legitimate acquaintance. To have met Mr. Askew's well-bred advances with repulsive dignity would have been enough, as she justly felt, to awaken suspicion in the breast of that very keen female looker-on ; and, ignorant as poor Lizzie—from the peculiar circumstances of her "nursing"—naturally was, of the wiles of her sex, she nevertheless felt an intuitive conviction that, as a rule, it is not from women that a "forlorn and shipwrecked *sister*" is likely to meet the readiest sympathy the quickest aid in her hour of need. So, though in presence of that smirking, civil tradeswoman, Lizzie conducted herself as might have done any pretty, well-dressed lady, comfortably convinced of her own attractions, and not sorry to have the tedium of a long Winter's day broken in upon by the advent, on the narrow stage of her existence, of such an accomplished



and agreeable actor as the man whom Guy had admitted to be a "thorough gentleman;" her distinct and unqualified refusal to gratify Charley's curiosity on the subject of her future home was a proof, that in spite of the disadvantages of youth, inexperience, and a great deficiency of moral courage under which she laboured, the supply of *griffes et ongles* for her own defence, was not, in her idiosyncrasy, wholly wanting.

"Do you dare me, then, to find out what I want to know?" he had asked. "Think how much I have already discovered! Your name, to begin with," he continued, watching the mobile face *so* curiously; whilst Lizzie, unable to suppress the faintest of smiles, at a boast which was so entirely without foundation, fell easily into the trap which her more crafty companion had set for her. Charley Askew was convinced *now* of that which he had only before thought probable. The name of "Fletcher" was, without doubt, a borrowed one! An alias, for what purpose assumed it must be now his task to discover.

She answered his questions quite frankly, and with so much quiet ease of manner that Charley grew more and more puzzled as to the "estate" in which it behoved him, in his own innate convictions, to place her.

"I shouldn't think of 'daring' you," she replied, simply; "but I feel almost sure that if I were to ask, quite seriously, a favour of you, that you would not refuse to grant it."

He laughed a little at this, swinging about carelessly, as he did so, a light riding-whip which he carried in his hand.

"You think better of me, I fear, than I deserve," he said; "for if your request chanced to be—and I can quite fancy it, you look so terribly severe and stern—that I should give up trying to see you, that I should endeavour to leave off thinking of you, and hoping to be one day admitted as a visitor to your house——"

"It is useless thinking of *that*," smiled Lizzie, who could not always help yielding to the girlish fancy of rendering more puzzling still the mystery which surrounded her. "I *never*



have visitors. No one ever comes to see me."

"Not even Mr. Temple?" he asked, fixing his slow, deep gaze upon her face, after a fashion which called the rebellious blood tumultuously into cheeks which were usually perhaps a "thought" too pale to suit the taste of the "many."

"Oh! Guy is nobody!" she hastily exclaimed. "I mean," correcting herself, and making an effort to speak calmly, "I mean that he cannot be called a visitor—he is not——" And then, feeling the utter impossibility of offering any explanation which, whilst it might exonerate herself, would, at the same time, *not* be acting in direct contravention of her husband's express commands, she stopped suddenly, her sweet lips quivering, while in her large blue eyes there was an expression of bewildered fear, such as may be seen sometimes in the gaze of a timid, hunted animal at bay.

At sight of her distress, Charley's discomfort grew—strange as it may seem—to be almost greater than her own. This beautiful creature,

with her unknown antecedents, her evidently questionable position, and the as evident modesty and air of "breeding" which Charley, a finished judge of such matters, could not, he felt certain, be mistaken in deeming genuine, must have taken a strong hold either on his senses or his imagination—(perhaps, on *both*)—or that wild dare-devil of a Charley, whose successes, albeit he was a man whose "little member" boasted neither of small or large things, were proverbial, would never have been so regularly taken aback by the sympathy with that frail, fragile thing.

"I am so sorry I spoke of it," he stammered. "But I am such a fool! Always saying the wrong thing to the wrong person. But you *will* believe, Mrs. Fletcher, that——"

She paused suddenly in her walk, and fronting him, as they neared the tiny shrubbery-like approach through which the house-door of Harcourt Villa was gained, she said, with a spirit that took him entirely by surprise,

"My name is not Fletcher—I daresay that

you, who seem to have ways of finding out everything, know, as well as I do, that it is not. I cannot tell you more. I wish I could. It is so dreadful to be despised!—so degrading to be suspected! I am not angry,” she went on hastily—“the fault is not yours, and you have been quite as respectful as I had any right to expect you would be. No, I won’t let you take my hand,” she, with almost passionate eagerness, as she snatched her fingers from the grasp of his, exclaimed, “I only wish you to go, and never, never think of me again.”

“A wish which you must be aware by this time it is impossible to realise,” said Charley; and then, as Lizzie passed through the green gate, on the top bar of which “Harcourt Villa” was painted in large letters, he raised his hat with as much courtesy as if he were saluting a “ladye of high degree,” and then, with an *au revoir* which, in its cheerful ring, certainly did not sound very like despair, he went on his way, if not exactly rejoicing, at least with nothing like despondency in his heart.

Guy Temple passed that evening—(almost the last which in Harcourt Villa would be honoured with his presence)—in the bowers of his Rosamond. The hours slipped peacefully away, for on that occasion Lizzie, possibly remembering that the subject had seemed a distasteful one to Guy, did not *happen* to mention that she had chanced to fall in—a second time—with the man to whose honour it was not considered safe to confide the secret that she was “an honest woman.”

## CHAPTER XVI.

IT was the close of February. The "neck of the Winter," as the old countrified saying has it, "was broken," the days were "getting out," and the warmth of the sun was beginning, as a Spring-time fact, to assert itself, when Reginald Temple's health and spirits—the condition of which was a normal source of anxiety to his mother—betrayed tokens, in the opinion of that devoted watcher, of requiring a "change." Since the departure of Sir John Marsden for Australia, an act of brotherly devotion which Mrs. Temple—jealous, and selfish for her blind son, whose few pleasures she could ill bear to see curtailed—had never brought herself wholly to forgive, Regy had



been, comparatively speaking, very little from home. He had missed, more than he had cared to say, the intelligent companionship of his friend. The man who is "eyes to the blind," after the fashion which for years Jack Marsden had been to Regy, must possess a rare combination of qualities, seldom, in the rougher sex, found united—the qualities, namely, of patience, self-denial, tenderness, and tact, a soothing voice (for *l'oreille est le chemin du cœur*), a talent for description—all these, and more than these are needed, and it was indeed—as Mrs. Temple was never tired of saying—a subject for the deepest thankfulness that, in his former tutor, Regy should have found one who was not only able, but willing, to be to him a more than brother in his affliction.

They had been out walking—the mother and son—as far as a sheltered flower-garden that lay snugly nestled under the South Terrace at Temple Court. The first tender green of the sweetbrier buds was always to be found in the low hedge which parted off the little spot once

known as "Master Regy's garden" from the larger and more artistically laid out flower-beds, in tending which, during the early days of her married life, Mrs. Temple used to spend many hours of the time which had not then begun to hang heavily on her hands. And now, in her mature age, with so much of her earthly love centred in the son whose chest was delicate, and to whom, from the nature of his affliction, the return of the balmy airs and glorious brightness of the Spring were events not merely of normal and unexciting occurrence, but an ever-recurring cause for gratitude and joy, Gertrude Temple, remembering well how sure a refuge from the sharp east wind was the seat beneath the tall, clipped holly-hedge, and that there—lured out by the first breath of Spring—the earliest violets were to be found shyly peeping from out their verdant nest, had, from the first days of her boy's convalescence from the terrible illness which culminated in his loss of sight, led him to that tranquil spot where, in the after-time, so many

of the unchangeable hours which made up the sum of poor Regy's daily life sped by.

They were leaving the garden—Mrs. Temple leaning on her son's arm (for among her touching affections, born of her deep mother's love, was that of allowing it to appear that *she* was receiving aid and support from *him*), and glancing anxiously at the pale, worn young face, as Regy, with a strange but unspoken rapture (not, alas! the "rapture of repose," for the influence of the season was upon him, and the "languid sweetness wafted on vernal airs" seemed to choke his breath) inhaled, from time to time, the perfume of the violets which his mother had gathered, and placed in his thirt, nerveless fingers. *Her* face, too, was aged and spiritless, and on the soft hair which, three years before, had been all dark and abundant, there were now thin lines of silver, which, happily for Guy (is there not for most evils *some* compensating good?) he neither saw nor dreamt of.

The Spring of the year is, according to the

dictum of old nurses—a dictum, by the way, which is fully endorsed by Democritus, junior, in his quaint book, yclepte “The Anatomy of Melancholy”—a trying time; and never, perhaps, is it more trying, especially to the young, than when the long dark days of Winter have been passed in a dreary stagnation, even the memory of which is enough to make the young heart bound with joy at the mere thought of change.

“He is but twenty-two, poor boy!” sighed Gertrude Temple to herself; and then she said aloud, “Regy, my dear boy, you are not quite like yourself to-day—nor were you yesterday, nor the day before. Spring is your worst time.”

“I know that, mother, dear—it always was. I was in hopes that this year I should be able to stave it off; but it is creeping on again—the old lassitude, the want of sleep, the wearying restlessness.”

“Which nothing ever cures except change of place and movement. My dear, if Sir John

were in England, instead of being away on that wild-goose chase, you would not be at Temple Court now."

"Perhaps not. Dear old Jack! He was always for keeping my helpless self moving."

"And you liked it? You felt it did you good?"

"With *him*, yes. He is so cheery; and was so wonderfully clever at making me believe, for the time being, that he was the one most pleased with and most likely to be benefited by the *outing*. Now Dixon is a capital fellow, and more intelligent than most of his class; but," smiling, as the notion of associating an outspoken, attached old servant with anything approaching to super-refinement of feeling flashed across his mind, "he 'wouldn't understand, not he, no nonsense o' that kind.'"

"But," persevered Mrs. Temple, who was not to be deceived by the poor ghost of gaiety which her son had conjured up—"but, my dear boy, you don't *dislike* going away—travelling, I mean—with Dixon? I know it's different from

having a companion with whom you could talk." And then, with a sigh, she added, "Ah! how I wish I could set off somewhere with you myself!"

He pressed with warm affection the hand that rested on his arm. "Dear Mammy," he said, in the soft, low voice which had in it still something of a boyish ring, "that *would* be something."

And then he too sighed, for the idea occurred to him, even as it did to her, and as it has done to more unappreciated wives than could well be counted up, how strange it is that the self-same woman to whom her husband never accords a syllable of praise or sign of appreciation, the woman whom he taunts with her idleness, her incapacity, and uselessness, he, all the while (so thoroughly necessary is she—albeit the confession that she is so, he will never allow to pass his lips—to his daily comfort) will never permit, an he can help it, to stray from the autocratic summons of his "beck and call."

Not even Mr. Reginald's good friend of this sort, neither Mr. nor Mrs. were well aware, would Mr. Temple have parted even for a day from his window-seat; but when on that same evening she asked his consent to her plan of sending Reggy for a few weeks to London, in order that he might hear some good music, and perhaps take a few singing-lessons from a first-rate master, Richard Temple at once accorded an ungenerous consent.

The relief from every-day monetary anxiety which, through the means of Laura's liberality and timely aid, had been afforded to the harassed man, had produced but little effect in ameliorating a temper which nature, as well as habit, had combined to render simply detestable. Richard Temple had so long been in the habit of indulging himself in peevish outbreaks, which enlivened for him the monotony of his existence, that when, as must sometimes, even "in the worst regulated families," happen, no legitimate cause for outbreak occurred, he would go a good deal out of his way in search

of that which did not come readily to hand. For her own part, Gertrude cared but little for these domestic storms. Time was when she shrank and shivered under their pelting, cowering under the blast after a fashion which certainly did not tend to avert the evil from her bent-down head, whilst, on the contrary, this evidence of a weak man's power induced, in the autocrat who held the sceptre, a sensation that was decidedly flattering and agreeable. The time came, however, and that sooner than Mrs. Temple could have at the first either hoped or expected, when love for her husband, together with the "fear that hath torment," ceased, and with that cessation came comparative peace. When Richard Temple found that the torrent of angry words produced no more effect on his wife's spirits or temper than do raindrops falling on the glossy feathers of a wild bird's wing, "the wicked ceased" (comparatively speaking) "from troubling, and the weary woman was" (so far as her own comfort was concerned) "at rest."



“Certainly he may go. Why do you ask me? As if other people’s wishes were not always paramount with me! But it always gave you pleasure to make me out a tyrant in my own family,” said the peevish man, who—a peculiarity to which his wife was well accustomed—generally contrived, by some ungracious words, or equally unpalatable deeds, to give a bitter flavour to the cup which, but for that admixture, might have been pleasant enough to drink of. It was something, however, to have gained her point, and Gertrude, sorely as she would miss her boy, nevertheless witnessed with satisfaction his departure.

London was beginning to fill, as the rattling of the carriages in the streets would, even if Dixon had not taken care to impart the fact to his master, have made patent to Reginald. One of his first acts—and it did not come precisely under the head of an agreeable duty—was to call upon Miss Bainbridge, with whom he was a decided favourite, the rare unselfishness of his character, and his patient endurance under

trial, filling even her narrow and unsympathising breast with a kind of admiring wonder, which might, and that with good reason, had Guy been aware of its extent, have set him trembling for the inheritance which he coveted.

Many weeks had elapsed since the still briefless barrister had put in an appearance at Temple Court, and this truth Reginald, when closely questioned by the old lady, found himself obliged to admit. The latter heaved a wheezy sigh over this confirmation, as she termed it, of her suspicions.

“I knew it—I was certain of it!” she exclaimed, triumphantly. “Your brother has never cared to go into Westhamptonshire since that young hussy—I forget her name, but you must know whom I mean—the farmer’s daughter, or something of the kind, took herself off in that extraordinary manner. It is my belief—but this is a secret, mind; it would distress me extremely if you were to speak about it; young men will, I am aware of that, *be* young men; and as to putting old heads on young shoul-

ders, why, it's nonsense to think of such a thing—it is, of course, very unpleasant to suppose that Guy's peculiarities of conduct can be in any way caused by the person whose conduct, to say the least of it——”

“Oh! but, Miss Bainbridge,” broke in poor Regy, on whose forehead (for, as we know, he was not physically strong, and any sudden emotion overcame him painfully) the perspiration stood like beads, “you wrong Guy—you do indeed. He knew nothing, perhaps, about Miss Fairholme going away—had as little to do with it as you or I. She is, they say, a governess now, in a family that lives almost entirely abroad. Mr. Beamish, her uncle, hears from her sometimes, and she always was so good and true——”

“Humph!” snorted Miss Bainbridge. “That’s as it may be! I confess, being an old-fashioned person, that I’m for *deeds*, before either looks or words; but with you young men it’s different. Let a girl have but a pretty face—I beg your pardon—I quite forgot——” Stopping short in

consternation, which, however, was speedily lessened by Regy saying, in his quiet way,

“Don’t distress yourself. You wouldn’t, if you knew how thoroughly I am accustomed to people losing sight of the fact that I am blind.”

“Do they? Well, I’m glad I’m not singular, at any rate,” said the well-to-do and thoroughly self-satisfied spinster, as she commenced the task of picking up a dropped stitch in her knitting. “But, as I was saying, a pretty face, for those that can see, and a winning tongue for such as have ears to hear, and a young man who hasn’t his wits about him is made a fool of at once. Now there’s your brother. If you ask *me* what’s the matter with him, I should say—but mind I don’t want to have it talked of, because there is something, in my opinion, very discreditable in a young man of family, and *perhaps* of fortune, thinking so much of a girl belonging to the lower classes—Well, *I* should say,” continued Regy’s tormentor, who was far enough from guessing how intense was the relief about to be afforded him by her words, “that Guy,

silly as it sounds, can't get that girl out of his head. What he does with himself when he isn't with me is more than I can tell you; and why he can't be satisfied to spend his evenings here, where I am sure there is every comfort" (the worthy proprietress, looking round admiringly at her heavy, old-fashioned chairs and sofas, added) "which a young man ought to wish for, would puzzle me, if I didn't feel certain, disagreeable as the notion is, that Guy is *moping*!"

Regy's light, almost boyish laugh rang out merrily, a good deal to his hostess's discomfort, at this climax in the old maid's speech. Sooth to say, the idea that the worm of concealment (the concealment of a hopeless love) was feeding on Guy's hirsute cheek, struck Reginald as simply ludicrous. He was so happy, too, so intensely relieved to find that the shadows, vague and visionary as a rule, but which sometimes, to his torment, had assumed shapes approaching to the tangible and real, were, in *fact*, *solely* the offspring of an imagination which physical blindness had assisted to

render almost morbidly susceptible. There should henceforth, he told himself, be no coupling together in his mind of those two names—the names of Guy and of the girl who, as long as life would linger in Reginald's breast, must ever be to him the embodiment of all that was sweet and graceful, lovable and winning. Is it strange, think you, or inconsistent with his gentle and well-disciplined nature, that whilst feeling thus towards the "Lily of the Lees," Reginald should have shown himself utterly incapable of sympathising with his brother in any of the trials to which, when the course of a man's "true love" fails to "run smooth," he might be exposed? It is just possible—the human heart is formed of such strange materials—that Regy felt, in that heart of his, far more compassion for the troubles of a weak girl, who was neither kith nor kin to him, than for the sentimental sorrows, if any such existed, of a brother whose depression of spirits would have been alone ample proof to Regy that, as regarded Lizzie Fairholme, he (Guy) had no triumphs to boast of.

That Miss Bainbridge, whilst affecting so thoroughly to despise both the position and attractions of the girl of whose beauty, as well as her pretensions to "ladyhood," the rigid spinster had, during the latter's stay at Temple Court, heard so much, should at the same time stoop to the admission, voluntarily made on her part, that not altogether with impunity to himself had Guy Temple indulged in those stolen *tête-à-têtes* with the farmer's niece, was somewhat of a puzzle to Reginald. It was not, however, one which he cared at present to solve. He had promised to meet Guy at dinner that evening in Gloucester Place, and it was just possible—reticent although he knew his brother to be—that in the course of conversation something calculated to throw a light upon subjects which were at present involved in obscurity might drop from the lips of the "moping" man.

Meanwhile, Reginald, whose naturally cheery though variable spirits were just then at their flow, wended his way, his hand resting lightly

on Dixon's still stalwart arm, towards the South Kensington Museum, where he fully expected to derive considerable amusement from his attendant's simple descriptions of the curiosities—*multum abludit imago*—which are collected in that unique and wonderful collection.

The pace at which the pedestrians progressed was a slow one; and Dixon was careful to remark, for the benefit of his young master, on anything that on their way struck the faithful serving-man as worthy of notice.



## CHAPTER XVII.

THEY were in the Brompton Road, and had just turned away from the shop window of a half jeweller, half pawnbroker, the watches in whose emporium being priced, had excited in Dixon's mind (as they hung temptingly on their respective hooks) some wondering comment, when, on pursuing their walk along the broad and crowded *trottoir*, an exclamation of surprise that suddenly broke from his attendant's lips caused Regy to start, and change colour violently.

"My goodness, Master Reginald!" Dixon said, "if there ain't Miss Fairholme from the Lees!"

"Where? For Heaven's sake, where?" asked

excited Reginald, who never, since darkness fell upon him, had longed so ardently as now to see.

“There—she passed us—she is just ahead! If we hurry on, we shall overtake her.”

Which they did, for pressing forward eagerly, threading their way, after a fashion that was absolutely new to Reginald, through the crowded thoroughfare, they soon overtook the swiftly-walking figure (for Lizzie’s was not the sauntering pace of a woman who desires to attract attention); and then Dixon, without waiting to receive instructions—for curiosity, to say nothing of perhaps some better sentiment, spurred him on to action—laid his hand lightly on the girl’s arm, saying as he did so,

“Here’s Mr. Reginald, Miss.” And having thus taken the initiative, he left it to his companion to follow suit.

Which for the moment Regy, being out of breath, and feeling terribly nervous, was powerless to do, and it was therefore fortunate that Lizzie, though startled at first, and slightly

agitated, had, as it is called, her "senses about her."

"Come this way—this is a quieter road," she said. And then, still holding the hand which trembled, oh! so quiveringly at touch of hers, she led him down a comparatively empty street, which ran at right angles with the one they had been traversing.

Lizzie was the first to speak, and although she only gave voice to the simple question of "When did you come to London?" the low, pleasant tones had no more lost their power to charm than had the touch

"Of that dear hand, remembered well,"

its gift of causing the warm blood to course in double-quick time through the veins of Reginald Temple.

"Only yesterday," he answered. "How strange that we should meet! But I am very glad. It is so long—and oh! Miss Fairholme, you have been so missed! Are *they* in London—the family, I mean, with whom you wrote to Mr. Beamish that you——"

She started—(Reginald, who still held her hand, felt she did)—as if a wasp had stung her, and then said, very quickly, and as though not caring to allow herself time for reflection—

“Mr. Reginald, I must speak to you alone, if only for five minutes;” and then, turning to Dixon, who stood in open-mouthed but respectful wonder, for the “Lily” had “grown to be a foine young lady to look at, surely,” she said, with a pretty air of deprecation, “You won’t mind, Mr. Dixon? I ought to have spoken to my uncle’s old friend before,” and she held out a small hand (small, at least, for so tall a woman, and beautifully *gloved*) to Regy’s faithful attendant as she spoke.

The good, honest fellow, who felt terribly abashed and taken aback by this unexpected *condescension*—for Miss Fairholme had always been considered “rather ’igh” by such visitors at the Lees as were never admitted “except on business” to the young lady’s private sanctum—was beginning his little apologetic speech with a “No offence, Miss; I’m ’appy to see you

looking so well," when Reginald cut the matter short by saying decisively,

"You can go back to the hotel, Dixon, and wait for me there. Miss Fairholme will, I am sure, kindly give me her aid in helping to make a cab-driver understand that he is to take me home."

And having so said, Reginald Temple, with a smile on the thin, intellectual lip, which, at the age of twenty-two, was only just beginning to be darkened with the hirsute honours of manhood, added, addressing himself to Lizzie—

"And now, Miss Fairholme, if you will let me hope that I can be in the very smallest degree of service to you——"

They were in a short *cul de sac* of a street by this time, and Lizzie, as she placed her latch-key in the "receptacle" of a door which admitted lodgers to a considerable number of "flats," broke in upon her companion's words with a little cry, which went (so redolent was it of suffering) straight to Reginald's heart.

"You can't help me, Mr. Reginald," she said

—"no one can do that. But take care, please ; there are so many steps. *We* are in the fourth *flat*. I am so afraid you will be tired !"

And Reginald, believing, without much thought about the matter, that by the *we*, thus casually uttered, Lizzie intended to speak conjointly of herself and her employers, toiled, still holding, as a guide to his footsteps, the hand that——But what need is there to dwell upon such moments ? Troubles are coming thick and fast upon the poor lad to whose mental vision, only one short hour before, the silver lining of the cloud, which had so long overshadowed his existence, had been at last turned, and, dazzled by its brilliant surface, his mind's eye had, with the proverbial rapidity of thought, seen visions and dreamt dreams, which, as he climbed those steep, thrice-blessed stairs, his brain growing every moment more intoxicated by the contact of his own with those soft, warm fingers, it did not seem *quite* impossible that he might one day realize.

They reached the summit at last, and then,

another door being opened with another key, they were greeted by a gush of fragrance, the perfume of forced hyacinths and jonquils, which nearly took away Regy's breath, so powerfully did it affect the poor lad's senses.

"I feel," he said, as Lizzie deposited him in a chair, "like the blindfolded prince—wasn't he a prince?—in the 'Arabian Nights,' and I long to ask—only, as he did, I feel half afraid—what is to happen next?"

He waited silently for an answer, but none came; and then, listening more intently, he *thought* he could hear, but was not sure at first, that Lizzie Fairholme was weeping bitterly.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

REGINALD stretched out his two hands towards the direction whence the sound proceeded; and oh! how cruelly did he then feel his helplessness! It was solely by the *ear* that he could learn—and so imperfectly (for has not some one wise in his generation said that words were given us to conceal our thoughts?)—anything of the great sorrow which he felt was piercing through and through the tender bosom that was beating so near, and yet so far from his own. If he *could* but see her face! If he could but, gazing into the clear depths of the pure blue eyes, wet now with passionate tears, discover from *their* expression what was the nature of the grief which racked her breast,



there might be some light thrown upon her path, for now he recked not—deep and heartfelt as was his sympathy—whether silence or speech were best.

At last she spoke, but in a broken voice ; and Reginald, with the vividness of imagination which is alike the privilege and the torture of the blind, could picture to himself the

“ Bosom fair,  
Which came and went, beneath her *white robe*, like a sea.”

A sea over which the tempest has rushed furiously, leaving the “swell” behind, which told of the whirlwind that has passed, and left a devastating trace behind.

“ I am so sorry,” the piteous voice said. “ I did not bring you here, Mr. Reginald, for this.”

“ No, no—I am sure of that,” he said eagerly ; for he did so long—as if such a thing were within the bounds of possibility!—to comfort her. “ But, Miss Fairholme,” he went on recklessly, “ what is it—*do* tell me—that distresses you ? I am an old friend—at least——”

“ An old friend. Yes, and one whom I can

thoroughly trust—I feel so sure of that. And—I didn't *promise*—it was only understood that I was to be silent, and I do so stand in need of advice and comfort! Mr. Reginald," suddenly approaching near enough to lay her hand upon his shoulder, "will you, if I tell you all my trouble, *vow* to me that, till I absolve you from your promise, you will never repeat to any soul that breathes the secret which I am about to trust you with."

As she spoke, a strange inward shiver, born, perhaps (although Regy guessed it not), of a presentiment of evil to come, ran through his frame; but he trusted her so entirely, believed in her as in the incarnation of all that was good and pure, so that, without a moment's doubt or hesitation, he gave the required promise.

"I shall be proud to keep your secret," he added simply, as a faint smile lighted up for a moment the blind, patient face; and then Lizzie, kneeling by the side of her young brother-in-law—*he* totally ignorant, meanwhile, that the object of his adoration had assumed the atti-

tude of a penitent—commenced in a low, humble voice her confession.

“I have deceived everybody,” she said—  
“cruelly and heartlessly deceived them. I made it appear that I was proud and independent, and hated to be any longer a burden to my uncle—my dear, kind uncle, who never said a harsh word to me in his life, and so—— Well, as you know, I went away by stealth, and wrote—oh, so meanly!—all sorts of falsehoods, to turn away suspicion, while all the time—— Ah! how can I say it? You will never think well of me again; and I have so prized your good opinion!—Mr. Reginald, won’t you speak to me? Won’t you say one little word to make my confession easier to me?”

And as she spoke the pleading words, she ventured timidly to touch the cold hand which hung listlessly by the side of her agitated auditor.

The slight pressure—so entirely was every faculty he possessed absorbed by the interest of the girl’s terribly suggestive words—passed

unnoticed ; but, understanding, through it all, her wish that he should speak, he contrived, with an evidently painful effort, to say,

“Go on, please, if doing so does not distress you too much. And as to *my* opinion—— Oh ! Miss Fairholme, if you did but know——”

And then he checked himself suddenly, flushing to the roots of his fair hair, and feeling, poor lad, *so* guilty !

The repetition of her maiden name struck a fresh chord in Lizzie’s breast, and suddenly recollecting that the near connection which existed between her and her visitor, rendered any formal address either from the one or the other to be out of place and character, she, being far indeed from surmising what were the wild thoughts surging in that poor boy’s breast, exclaimed,

“Don’t, please, call me Miss Fairholme. You won’t when I have told you all. But let it be ‘Lizzie.’ I have so often wished for a brother—the kind, good brother that you will be to me ; for I am not afraid of *your* pride. And, besides,”

she added, as some of the old besetting sin cropped up amongst her better and humbler feelings, "*you* would make the others see that there would be no disgrace in the connection. My poor father was as good a gentleman as—but Mr. Reginald," she cried, noticing for the first time the deadly pallor which had spread over the face whose workings had been half hidden by the hand which the poor fellow had placed before it as a mask, "what is the matter? Are you faint? It is this hot room, and the flowers—they are so over-sweet." And Lizzie, first throwing open the window, for the atmosphere was, as she had remarked, oppressive, was hurrying away in search of such simple restoratives as her slight knowledge of the healing art suggested to her as appropriate to the case, when Regy's voice, low, but quite firm and distinct, arrested her steps. The tone in which he spoke was very quiet, for the flutter of Hope's wings which had "troubled" the air, and set his voice a-quivering, was stilled for ever; and in the dull reality of despair, there

was a stagnation that almost seemed like peace.

"Thanks for the air," he said. "I am sorry my white face frightened you. My mother, who is accustomed to these 'little seizures,' as they are called, of mine, would have taken the matter much more quietly. But how ungracious you must think me! Such an unheard-of manner of receiving news, too! For I think that you must mean—you *must*," with a strong emphasis on the repeated word, "or I am become stupid as well as blind, that you are engaged to marry my brother Guy?"

Finding that she did not answer his question at once, he went on more calmly,

"And if so, for silence must mean, I think, assent, I trust, dear Miss Fairholme, that——"

But he was allowed no time for his tardy congratulations. For prefacing her words with a short hysterical laugh, one which was so utterly devoid of merriment, and so strangely forced that its sound haunted sensitive Reginald disagreeably for many an after-day, she said,

"You forget—you mustn't call me *that* any

more. My name is not Fairholme now ; and, oh ! Reginald, cannot you guess ? I have been for months your brother's wife."

## CHAPTER XIX.

SHE told him—(the ice being once, with one exception, broken)—*everything*. Her “mad ambition,” which had, poor child, o’erleapt itself; and how, having “fallen on the other side,” the shock had subdued, and crushed, and humbled her.

“But I have been rightly served,” she said—  
 “so rightly! I thought of nothing, and of no one but myself. To become, *openly*, what I had always chosen to consider myself, a ‘lady’—such nonsense I think all that now—to escape from the companionship of relations whom I was wicked enough to consider as beneath me, I was so vile as to give myself to a man whom I did not, even at the moment when I promised



to be his, feel at all sure that I loved as I ought to have loved the man whom I had engaged to marry."

To describe Reginald Temple's feelings as he listened to poor Lizzie's revelations would be difficult, if not, indeed, impossible. The mere fact of Guy being married (*secretly*, as every word that fell from his young wife's lips implied) was, since it stamped with dishonour the man who had done the deed, a heavy blow to Regy. That Lizzie still remained in utter ignorance of the chief reason why it was necessary to keep the marriage a secret, was clearly patent to Reginald. She had never, in that out-of-the-world farm-house where her days of innocence and ignorance had been passed, learned anything of College Fellowships, of the privileges which they confer, or the penalties which the heads of Colleges have been enabled to enforce. Nor was it, Reginald told himself, any more his duty, than it was his inclination, to enlighten his young sister-in-law on the subject. On himself the blow (that of his brother's disgrace) had

fallen with such cruel force that to have inflicted a similar one on the woman who bore his name would have been a task utterly beyond his powers. He felt, too, with the intuitiveness which was peculiar to him, that Guy had already, from causes which the younger brother would not, had he cast the mental plumb-line down, have found it difficult to fathom, lost much ground in the opinion of his wife; for Lizzie, brimful of wrongs and trials which for months had been fermenting, with no "escape," or safety-valve, within her breast, poured forth excitedly her complaint of the especial injury which, in the matter of Colonel Askew, had been inflicted on her.

"I reminded your brother," she said, passionately, "as often as I dared, of the cruelty he was guilty of in allowing that man to think such evil of me; but he did not care, no, not one atom, either for my shame or his. If he would only, as I said, explain in confidence to Colonel Askew that I am not the wicked woman which *he* must consider me; but, no, I might as well

have pleaded to a rock! So let him take the consequences. When he has made me wholly reckless, he may perhaps regret that, through his refusal to do me justice, I have been subjected to insult and contempt."

There had been another word upon her lips, one which would have awakened still more fear for her in Regy's heart, the betraying word, namely of "*temptation*;" but she checked it summarily. With the false sophistry which, when principle and inclination are at variance, we are all so given to employ, Lizzie persuaded herself that she had no right to reveal *his* secret, the secret of the man whose persistent pursuit of her—a pursuit which, you may be sure, she did not fail to contrast favourably with her husband's coldness and neglect—flattered her girlish vanity, and was beginning—albeit as yet she knew it not—to touch her heart.

And now, methinks I hear some of my readers, those belonging to the *champ vierge*, exclaim, "What a shocking woman! How thoroughly perverted! And *we* are expected to take an

interest in this creature! A wretch who is already tired of the husband for whose sake she, only a few months ago, braved public opinion in a most shameful manner, and proved herself the most ungrateful of her sex!"

To the *mercy* of such commentators as these—commentators who, being themselves human, and therefore liable to err, are so "extreme to mark what is done amiss"—it being, I fear, useless to appeal, I shall endeavour, in defence of my heroine, to say a few reasoning words. She was, as you may remember, very young, and, although perhaps not more silly than are most girls of her age, she possessed but little of the sense and steadiness which years and experience do not always give to women. To deny that Lizzy Temple possessed the evil and dangerous qualities of pride, vanity, and a passionate desire to be loved and appreciated, would be to make an exemplification of the "perfect monster which the world ne'er saw," of a young girl whose situation was so abnormal, and whose advantages of education and

example had been so singularly few. And then, chief causes of all for a condition of mind that was terribly productive of evil consequences, this neglected wife had ceased, chiefly by reason of the contempt with which his conduct inspired her, to love her husband ; and, moreover, in the enforced idleness to which she was almost necessarily exposed, there was time enough and to spare for "thoughts that breathed and words that burned" to take very mischievous hold upon her busy and ever restless fancy. But be this as it may, and whether, in Lizzie's case, the existence of extenuating circumstances be admitted or not, certain it is that, though perhaps not known or acknowledged by herself, Guy Temple's wife found herself in the "midst of dangers," wherein it is difficult for a woman, lonely, weak, and unprotected, to "stand upright."

That this was so, Reginald, till he was enabled—alone, and with something approaching to calmness—to think over this terrible revelation, failed to realise. It was Lizzie's own

words which awoke him, on deep reflection, to a sense of her danger. "May he never have cause to regret a refusal which has subjected me to insult and to shame!" This was the sentence which had broken from the lips of the excited girl; nor were there wanting (in Regy's opinion) other circumstances tending to corroborate the, by him, suspected fact, that Lizzie's worst enemy was not the one of her own household who had first tempted her from the path of rectitude and honour, and there left her alone to do battle, as best she could, against the temptations by which she was surrounded.

The character of Charley Askew was as well known in Westhamptonshire as elsewhere. Pleasant, "fast," popular, a "good fellow," though "far as the poles" from being a "good" man, he was an object of strong attachment to his only brother, the impecunious Curate of Lynemead, who, as the reader may happen to recollect, was guilty of the folly of giving up a lucrative College Fellowship, in order (a gross act of selfishness, in the opinion of many)

that he might marry a young governess whose beauty had made her pleasing in his sight ; and many a time and oft had Reginald listened to poor Bob's enthusiastic praises of his elder brother, who, if he ever did happen to possess a pound (which, unfortunately, seeing that Charley was an "out-and-out" spendthrift, never was the case), would, according to the belief and assertion of the much-tried curate, have been only "too happy" to share that pound with *him*.

That Charley was a "little wild," even this partial brother did not attempt to deny ; but then there were so many excuses for him.

"An elder son, you know," the envy-lacking young divine would add ; "and the women do spoil him so ! He will be all right in time, but it's hard, as the saying is, to 'bout ship when the wind's astern, and when you know Charley" (this to Regy, whose frequent visits at the curate's comfortless lodgings were always welcome, not only to "Bob" himself, but to the young wife who was "under the ban"), "you

will understand why everyone is so fond of him. Mary is in an awful fright at the thought of his coming, and says she knows he'll see directly that her hands are red ; but I tell her—don't I, Polly?—that Charley'll have something else to think of when he comes than *her* paws. So mind you don't make tea in that dreadful pair of bottle-green gloves that you expended two precious shillings on yesterday," added the curate, laughing, as he pinched the rosy cheek of the wife who adored him.

Bob Askew was, I think, more sorry than surprised to find that, after some hours spent in Charley's society, Reginald Temple could not bring himself to say much in praise of the man of whose merits he had heard so much. The elder brother had certainly plenty to say, but he talked, as prosperous people are apt to do, a good deal about himself, and, what was, though less tiresome, far more inexcusable, his conversation was a good deal too apt to verge on impropriety and *double-entendre*. "It's quite a new thing his doing so," Bob said afterwards,



apologetically, to the friend in whose presence he would have given much of the little he possessed, had Charley known how better to bridle his tongue—"quite a new thing. You see, men catch that sort of talk, without meaning anything, from those they live with." And having so said, the subject—not a very alluring one to a thoroughly well-intentioned and steady-going Christian person—was dismissed, and with it (till the mention of Charley Askew by Lizzie brought the memory of the man vividly before Reginald Temple's mind) there had faded from the recollection of the latter all thoughts of (as a person in whose proceedings he was in the slightest degree interested) the free-spoken and evidently careless-of-*principle* elder brother of the Lynemead curate.

But, as I have just hinted, it required but a few words from Lizzie's lips to bring vividly before Reginald's mind the pleasant voice and laugh, the ready humour (or the something which did duty for it), and the quickness at giving a *questionable*, and sometimes an amusing

turn to conversation, which were characteristic of Charley Askew.

Slight as was Regy's acquaintance with the type of man represented by the Guardsman, it was yet clear enough to the former that no time, if Lizzie were to be saved from *peril*, ought to be lost in setting matters—as regarded her real position—to rights. And yet how, he asked himself, could such a bringing to light of the truth be effected in this terrible complication of circumstances? In the first place—most effectual bar to the attainment of the desired end—he had pledged his word to Lizzie that her secret was safe with him; and then, even if he could bring himself to virtually break that promise, and by means so contrary to his sense of right endeavour to drag from Guy the acknowledgment of his disgrace, there would remain, despite all that could be said or done, the stain, for ever undefaceable, which rested on his brother's honour.

Reginald groaned aloud as the utter hopelessness of the case came, in all its terrible

entirety, home to him. He was far too inexperienced, and of too rare and precious an honesty, for any of the "tricks" by which the truth *might* be glossed over, and a reputation saved, to even enter his head. For him the broad, unvarnished fact (how broad and how hideously ugly it appeared to *him*, few of those who live in the world, and are of it, could have understood) was all-sufficient to occupy his every thought, save those which were suggested by the memory of Lizzie's alarming words. On his own sufferings, on the cloud which had in one fell moment come between him and life's sunshine, obscuring the bright, though passing beam for ever, he did not even for a second dwell. He never even whispered, in self-pity to his heart, the desolating truth that the hope, shadowy and intangible as it was, which had so long been "his best companion by the way," had vanished for ever, and that the one sweet face he had seen and worshipped—he could never in all his lifetime, poor lad, behold another—must henceforth be thrust from his memory,

even as we have sometimes seen a portrait (the likeness of one who is either dead or "*guilty*,")—turned face wallwards, on the very spot which whilom it had, with smiling lips and beaming eye, brightened with a gladdening light.

If it be true—which doubtless it is—that "use doth breed a habit in a man," then Regy had a right to bear his trial bravely. And he did so bear it, losing sight, as far as such a thing is possible to weak, erring mortals, of self, and fighting hard against the only evil feeling (one of bitter wrath towards his brother) which had ever found a place within his breast. Fighting stoutly, but not, as yet, conquering, for Reginald cannot bring himself, in his present mood of mind, to meet Guy, he pictures to himself the dining-room in Gloucester Place, with *him*, and that double-died-in-guilt brother seated opposite to him, and feels that it would be next to impossible, when they two would be left *tête-à-tête* over Miss Bainbridge's fiery port, for him not to "speak with his tongue" on the

subject that was so near his heart. And this being so, he decided, having a due regard to the keeping of his promise, to send an excuse, the ever-ready one of sudden *indisposition*, to Gloucester Place; and the following day, when Guy returned his brother's visit of the previous afternoon (for, on leaving Miss Bainbridge's house, Regy had "dropped a card" in "Paper Buildings), the answer at the quiet "Family Hotel" in which the blind lad had taken up his temporary abode, was that "Mr. Reginald Temple had left town."

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.



